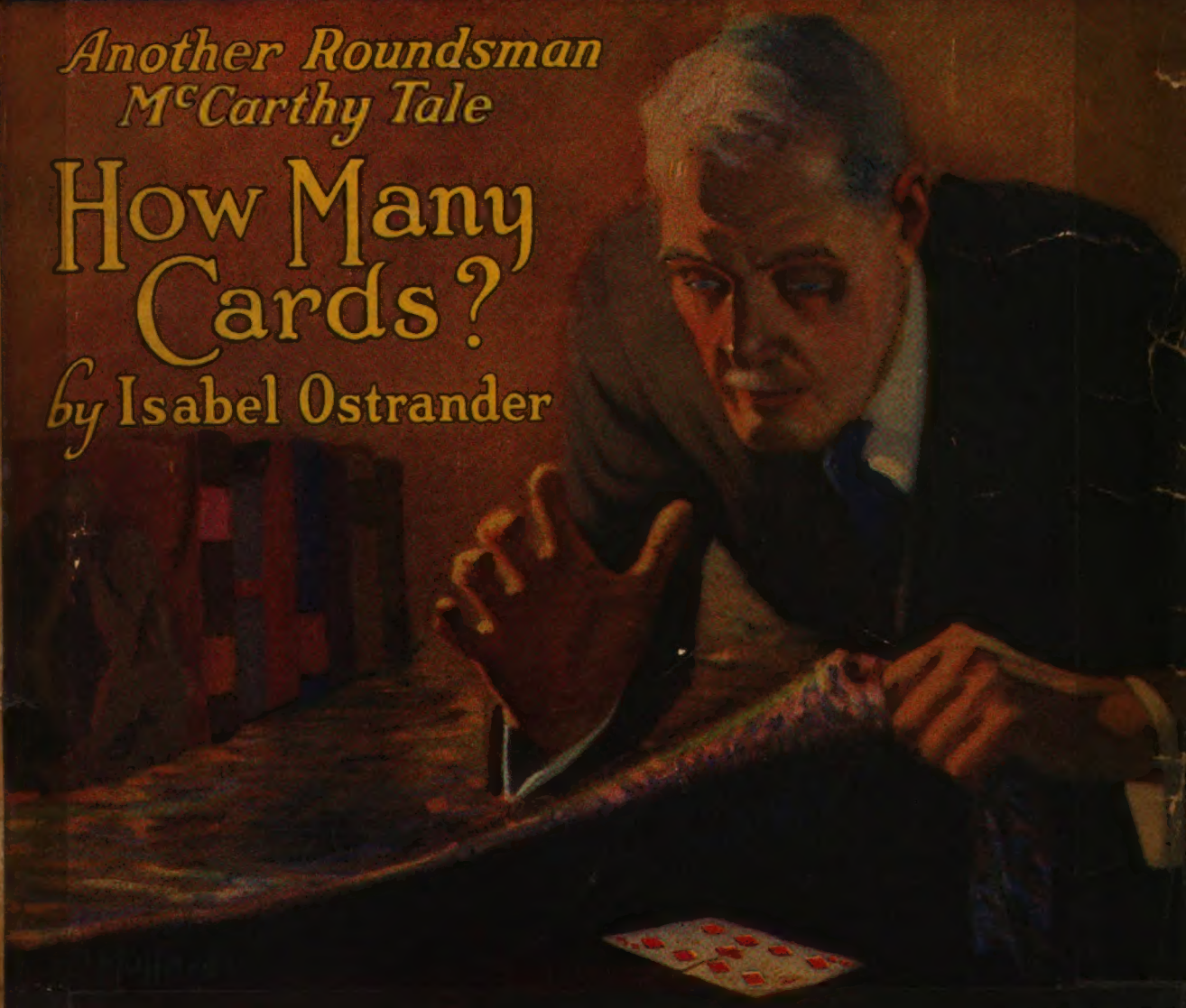


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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIII

CONTENTS FOR JULY 24, 1920

NUMBER 3

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## SEVEN CONTINUED STORIES

How Many Cards ? . . . . .	Isabel Ostrander . . . . .	289
A Seven-Part Story — Part One		
The Progress of J. Bunyan . . . . .	Stephen Chalmers . . . . .	318
A Four-Part Story — Part Three		
Beware of the Bride . . . . .	Edgar Franklin . . . . .	342
A Six-Part Story — Part Two		
Pride of Tyson . . . . .	John Frederick . . . . .	379
A Six-Part Story — Part Four		
Moors End . . . . .	Jeannette I. Helm . . . . .	407
A Four-Part Story — Part Three		
Circumstances . . . . .	Charles King Van Riper . . . . .	437
A Two-Part Story — Part Two		
Land of the Shadow People . . . . .	Charles B. Stilson . . . . .	466
A Five-Part Story — Part Five		

## ONE NOVELETTE

The Gift House . . . . .	E. K. Means . . . . .	368
--------------------------	-----------------------	-----

## NINE SHORT STORIES

The Brazen Serpent . . . . .	H. Bedford-Jones . . . . .	311
Teach: Pirate De Luxe . . . . .	C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne . . . . .	335
X — THE SHEEP-STEALER		
Action ! . . . . .	Horatio Winslow . . . . .	360
The Ghost . . . . .	Max Brand . . . . .	400
Entirely Without Notes . . . . .	Jack Bechdok . . . . .	429
Debts . . . . .	Roy W. Hinds . . . . .	458
Ten Minutes . . . . .	Valgard Dengir . . . . .	488
Odd and Beautiful . . . . .	Ferdinand Grahame . . . . .	492
A Moor There Was . . . . .	Eugene A. Clancy . . . . .	506

## HIGH LIGHTS FOR JULY 31

An out-of-the-ordinary serial  
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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIII

SATURDAY, JULY 24, 1920

NUMBER 3

## How Many Cards?

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Cents," "Suspense," etc.

**STOP!** Look! And Listen! Ex-roundsman Timothy McCarty is on the job again. And you know that means some job or Tim would not touch the case. This new Isabel Ostrander story will banish boredom, hold your interest and challenge your own powers of detection as no other story ever did. This is high praise and we know it. But this first instalment will justify our encomiums and leave you with an itching curiosity to know the whole story. And then you will agree with us—"Same Story!"

### CHAPTER I.

EX-ROUNDSMAN M'CARTY MINES IN.

**E**X-ROUNDSMAN TIMOTHY McCARTY was taking one of the nocturnal strolls so habitual with him as to have become almost instinctive since the far-off days when, as Officer 804, and one of the finest, he had pounded his beat.

It was a soft April night, starless, for the sky was still overcast from a recent shower, and the odor of wet earth and fresh, springing green things from the park across the avenue blended pleasantly with the smoke of the cigar which tilted upward from beneath his short, stubby, sandy mustache.

McCarty's meditations were pleasant, too, for earlier in the evening he had come

off victor in a strenuous debate with his old crony, Dennis Riordan, of the fire department, over old versus new police methods, and the memory of it made his broad shoulders heave in a soundless chuckle.

All at once he paused in his measured, rhythmic tread, his teeth clamped down upon the cigar and his keen, twinkling blue eyes narrowed. A block ahead of him, keeping well in shadow, there slouched a figure whose type had been well known to him in the old days and among whose fraternity his own name had been mentioned blasphemously; but with bated breath.

The figure was that of an undersized, narrow-framed man who moved with the slow, crouching poise of a cat. He wore no

coat, but what appeared in the uttermost limits of the rays of a street lamp to be a sweater, and his cap was pulled so far forward over his eyes that the back of his small, bullet-shaped head was plainly visible.

McCarty clutched his stout umbrella more firmly and without obviously quickening his pace he nevertheless narrowed the distance between the slim, slinking figure and himself with every yard. Forgotten was the fact that he had long ago retired from the force to live on the comfortable inheritance from his saloon-keeping uncle; he was once again following his beat, and there before his eyes was a crook out to pull off a job!

The houses on the broad avenue which faced the park were veritable miniature palaces, each one occupied by a family whose rank in the social and financial world was of almost national reputation, and before the richest of these in the center of the block ahead, the figure paused.

Instantly McCarty flattened himself as much as his girth would allow against the wall of the house he was passing, mentally anathematizing the newer style of American basements which admitted of no protecting high entrances or areaways; but after a moment it was evident that his simple strategy had sufficed, for when he cautiously craned his neck around the slightly projecting cornice the figure had disappeared.

Save for the rumbling and lights of a bus approaching from the opposite direction the avenue was deserted, and it was inconceivable that in that instant the crook could have made off around the corner.

Moving with almost miraculous speed and silence McCarty sped to the house before which the figure had paused, and one glance showed the meaning of his sudden disappearance. The house was of white stone, wider and more imposing even than its neighbors, but, like them with a low, broad entrance door sunk three steps below the level of the street, a smaller tradesmen's entrance some distance away, and between them a row of wide, ornate windows.

The second one from the main entrance was open slightly, just enough for a bit of

the heavy lace of the curtain to have been caught in the crack and for the tiniest ray of subdued light to creep through.

"The carelessness of him!" McCarty grumbled to himself in disgust at this lack of thoroughness even in one of his sworn enemies. "That light's not moving; did he have the nerve, I wonder, to turn on—" His speculation came to an abrupt end and he dived down the shallow steps and crouched waiting to spring, for the heavy window had opened swiftly with no apparent effort at silence, the curtain was whisked aside and the sinuous figure wormed its way through and dropped the scant eight feet which separated the sill from the level of the pavement.

Instantly, before he could turn, a huge, stockily built form hurled itself upon him and in his complete surprise he was borne by sheer weight to the ground, where he was held and expertly frisked.

The whole affair had been a matter of seconds, and no sound had come from either man save the quick, sobbing breath of the captive and the heavier snort of McCarty, but as the latter stuffed into his own pockets with one hand the pistol, blackjack and skeleton keys which had been the result of his search, the other whined:

"Let me go, Mister! Honest t' Gawd, I ain't done a t'ing but just sneak in an'—an' right out! I ain't got nothin' on me, youse knows that! Honest t' Gawd—"

McCarty's answer was to drag the squirming, writhing youth to his feet with a firm grip on the collar of his sweater, and with his other hand to pick up the umbrella from where he had dropped it beside him, and rap smartly on the pavement for assistance.

"Oh, don't do dat! Let me go before de bull comes, mister, for de love o' Gawd! I swear it on me mudder dat I didn't have nothin' to do wit'—wit what's in dere!"

Mixed with the whine of fear there was a rising note of horror in the youth's tones which made McCarty drag him swiftly over to the nearest street lamp. The face which the culprit raised shrinkingly to his was weak and tremulous, with the shifting, ratlike eyes and pasty, yellow skin

of the typical gangster, but there was something more than the mere fear of being caught at housebreaking in his eyes; mortal terror looked out from them and McCarty's grip on his collar tightened as he regarded the trembling youth.

"What's in there?" he demanded, giving the all but collapsed figure a violent shake. "I don't know where the devil is Clancy, but what did you leave behind you in that house?"

"I didn't have nottin' to do wit' it, I'm tellin' youse! I just give it one look an' beat it! De foist job I ever tried to put over, an' now—"

But a tattoo of heavy footsteps came pounding along the sidewalk and in another moment a blue-coated figure dashed up to them.

"What's goin' on here? Somebody rapped— For the love of Heaven, 'tis you, Mac! And what have you there?"

"What you should have had if you'd been on your beat, Clancy!" McCarty retorted grimly. "A fine young second-story worker that I've been trailing these four blocks and more, and nabbed just as he was scrambling out of the window of that white house there after he had finished his job."

"I didn't finish no job!" the youth cried desperately. "Honest, I wasn't in dere two seconds! If you was trailin' me, mister, you know dat! I just give it a look an' started to make my getaway. Don't send me to de chair!"

"Chair, is it?" McCarty gave the policeman a significant glance. "I've been trying to get out of him what he did do in there while I was waiting for you to show up."

"We'll take him along and find out," Clancy declared briefly.

"No! Don't take me back to dat house!" the wretched youth wailed. "I don't wanna look at it again! I can't—"

Unheeding his protestations they dragged him back the few steps to the house where McCarty pointed to the opened window from which the subdued light filtering through the lace curtain fell in a delicately patterned square on the pavement.

"Who lives here?" he asked, as the

policeman pressed the button at the entrance door.

"Creveling, the millionaire," Clancy responded.

"Not Eugene Creveling, the fellow who used to pull off all those wild stunts on Broadway a matter of ten or fifteen years ago?" McCarty demanded. "They used to call him Million-a-Month Creveling!"

"I don't know anything about that," Clancy asserted. "Must have been before my time. All I know is, he's got a grand-looking wife and barring the big entertainments they give, the house is the quietest on the block. Here, you! Quit that or I'll give you a rap that'll put you to sleep!" This to the struggling youth who now, utterly unnerved, was sobbing wildly. "I wonder if they're all dead in here! Mac, go and try the other bell."

McCarty obeyed but with no result. Save for the low light glowing from the open window the huge house might have been indeed a tomb.

"There's nothing to it, Mac. We can't get anything out of this bird either, now. You get a hold of him and I'll go in the way he did, through the window."

McCarty gripped the shabby sweater collar once more and Clancy jumped up, caught the sill and swung himself over it, sweeping the curtain aside. It fell again into place and for a minute there was silence.

A second bus rumbled past, a limousine or two and a prowling taxi, but none saw the two figures huddled tense in the shadows.

"Say, what are you, mister, a dick?" the youth whined, passing his sleeve across his slobbered face. "If you trailed me like youse said, you know you didn't hear nottin'! You know I wasn't dere long enough to croak him!"

"Croak who?" demanded McCarty.

"De guy in dere in de soup-an'-fish, wit' a bullet t'rough his chest! You know I didn't do it! Dere ain't a pill gone from my gat! If youse an' de bull frames me—"

There came a rattling of bolts and chains on the inner side of the huge entrance door, and it divided and swung slowly inward, revealing Clancy standing grave-faced in the

aperture and behind him the wide marble staircase and rug-hung gallery of an imposing rotunda.

"Come in," he invited laconically. "I switched on these hall lights myself, but there were some already going in this room back here; come and see what I found."

He led the way across the marble hall, rich in the mellow, subdued colorings of the rugs and draperies under the soft lights, but funereal with the huge, carved chairs ranged in mathematical precision against the walls, and McCarty followed with the lagging, handcuffed youth in tow.

The door of a room beside the staircase was open, and as they reached it all three paused for a moment on the threshold. It was spacious in itself, although small in comparison with the vastness of the hall and was furnished as a study, with two davenport facing each other projecting from either side of the fireplace and a long Jacobean refectory table between. Book-cases lined the walls, a massive writing table stood between two windows at the rear and deeply upholstered chairs were scattered here and there each with a smoking-stand beside it, but McCarty's eyes took in the details with a mere glance.

His attention was riveted on the long figure clad in the perfection of dinner clothes which lay stretched upon the floor. The feet in their glistening pumps were upturned and a gleam of white showed where waistcoat and shirt front met, but all the upper part of the breast was stained crimson.

Clancy's face was white, and inured as he was to sights as hideous as this, McCarty felt a wave of nausea sweep over him, while their captive put his manacled hands over his eyes and moaned.

"Is it Creveling himself, do you think?" McCarty asked in a lowered tone.

For reply Clancy knelt beside the body and slipping his hand in the stained waistcoat pocket pulled out a platinum cigarette case as thin as a knife blade, the top of which, barely protruding, had caught his eye.

He held it up for McCarty to see, and the latter plainly read the initials upon it: "E. C. C."

"I remember now," he observed soberly. "I saw the name in the papers often enough, years past, to bring it back to me; Eugene Christopher Creveling."

Clancy replaced the cigarette case carefully and pointed to something which lay beside the body. It was a huge army pistol and it lay within touch of the finger-tips of that limp, nerveless right hand.

"I'll have a word with you, Clancy." McCarty turned and shoved his captive into the nearest chair. "Sit there, and if you stir I'll blow the head off you!"

But there was plainly no thought of either resistance or flight left in the boy; he half turned and resting his arms upon the wide-spreading ones of the chair, he buried his face in them.

McCarty drew his confrère to the other end of the room and with an ever-watchful eye upon the thief he whispered:

"He never had a hand in it, Clancy. I saw he was up to some mischief and I trailed him for four or five blocks, as I told you. I wasn't more than a block away when he skinned in that window and I didn't lose any time reaching the outside of it. There was no shot fired in the meantime and I'd hardly got here when he came squirming out again. I grabbed him and dragged him over to the light of that street-lamp and I saw that he was scared clean through; he looked as though he had seen a ghost! He's telling the truth, all right; that rat wouldn't have the nerve to stick up a kid coming home from the grocery on an errand for its mother!"

"Did you frisk him?" asked Clancy.

"I did, and found a gat on him that's like a toy cap-pistol compared to that gun lying there. Here it is."

He produced the keys, pistol and blackjack which he had taken from the thief, and after one look at them Clancy announced:

"We'll send for the wagon and have him held as a material witness; that junk he was carrying will send him up for a stretch, anyway."

After some search they located a desk telephone on the writing table, concealed and the policeman called up his precinct station-house and had the satisfaction of

knowing that the message was relayed to the borough headquarters.

"It's too big entirely for them to handle," declared McCarty contemptuously, when the other had hung up the receiver. "I'll put a call through myself to general headquarters and tip them off. Maybe my old friend Inspector Druet might be there and could happen along up here before the gumshoes from the bushes have a chance to ball up the game. It's highly irregular, but I'm only a private citizen now, by the grace of my uncle—may God rest his soul—and I'm free to do as I please."

## CHAPTER II.

### A BIT OF AMBER.

**T**O Inspector Druet, seated at his desk in the homicide bureau there presently came over the wire a well-known voice, husky with ill-suppressed excitement.

"Mac, you old scoundrel!" he exclaimed in affectionate banter. "Where have you been keeping yourself, and what are you doing this time of night?"

"I'm mixing in high society, sir," McCarty's tones were cautious. "I'm in a grand private house up on the avenue, facing the park just above the third side entrance—of the park, I mean, sir—and there 'll be quite a little party here soon, I'm thinking. Maybe you'd like to get in a little ahead—"

"What is it? Where are you?" The inspector's own tones had crisped. "Mac, have you tumbled head foremost into another—?"

"'Tis the house of Mr. Eugene Creveling, sir; him they used to call Million-a-month. Jim Clancy is here with me and a young crook we copped by the way, but none of the family seems to be at home except himself, and we found him with the heart of him pierced by a bullet from an army gun."

"I'll be with you," the inspector said briefly and the two receivers clicked in unison.

"It would never have been known until Heaven knows when if you hadn't nabbed this bird here," Clancy spoke with reluc-

tant, but irrepressible honesty. "By the keys of Saint Peter, Mac, you've pulled off more stunts since you left the force than when you were on it! First that girl who was flung out the window of the Glamorgan and then the other one that was strangled in the crime museum—"

"'Twas Terhune, the great scientific detective that got at the truth in the first case, and the inspector himself who did the work in the other," McCarty remarked with dignity. "I just poked around like the old has-been I am. But there comes the bus from the borough headquarters, and you'll be doing me a favor, Clancy, if you'll just forget I'm here until you're asked to tell what you know of it all. I'd like to snoop around a bit on my own account till the inspector gets here."

"How do we know it isn't suicide, anyway?" demanded Clancy as the clatter of the police gong grew louder on the air and his companion made for the door.

"Because there are no powder marks that I saw," McCarty replied succinctly. "If he'd held that cannon against his breast and fired it the powder would have been sprinkled all over the front of him."

As the automobile from the borough headquarters drew up before the door McCarty dodged into the room next to the study. It proved to be a breakfast-room, and the exroundsman whistled softly to himself as he cautiously closed the door after finding and turning on the wall switch, which made the single low light over the table burst into a golden glow.

The table was laid for two, and the remains of a supper were spread upon it, while an empty quart champagne bottle stood upon the floor and a second one reposed in the cooler, in the bottom of which a small quantity of ice still remained unmelted.

McCarty's brow knit at the sight of it, and he pulled out his watch.

"Quarter to three!" he muttered, then turned his attention to the table itself.

The food, upon one plate was scarcely touched, but breadcrumbs were scattered all about it and the wine-glass was empty. On the other hand, the second plate had been cleaned save for fragments, half a

roll lay beside it, and the glass was half full of dead champagne. Near at hand was an ash tray containing the stub of a cigarette and another unsmoked, but broken in two lay in the center of the table.

McCarty was turning away when almost imbedded in the heavy pile of the rug just beneath the end of the cloth close to the champagne bucket something shining caught his eye. It was a broken bit of amber from the mouthpiece of a cigarette-holder. He picked it up and shamelessly put it in his pocket.

The subdued purring of a second motor came to his ears and he left the breakfast-room and hurrying across the rotunda, flung open the house-door. Inspector Druet was descending the steps.

"Come in, sir," McCarty urged superfluously. "The men are here from borough headquarters and they are holding a grand session in the room where Mr. Creveling was killed."

He led his former superior into the breakfast-room and pointed to the table.

"Wherever the servants and the rest of the family have got to, there was two people had supper here to-night, as you can see, sir. One of them was contented and pleased, too interested to bother much with his wine, but ate a good meal, though something interrupted him before he finished smoking his cigarette, and if he left the room then he didn't take it with him. The other was nervous or angry or scared; couldn't eat, crumbled his bread, drank his wine to keep up his courage, but broke his cigarette in two and maybe his holder. One of them is lying dead in the next room and the other has gone. What's the answer, sir? It's up to you."

The inspector approached the table and gazed thoughtfully down upon its array of porcelain and silver and glass.

"You're getting to be quite in Wade Terhune's class with your deductions, Mac, but you're right, I think," he observed. "If Creveling sat here, where the food is almost untouched and the bread crumbled, it looks as though he might have known what was coming to him, or feared it, anyway. We'll find out what enemies he had—"

McCarty shook his head.

"I don't think so, sir," he said quietly. "I think it was his visitor who sat in that chair. Mr. Creveling was host and all the servants were gone unless they're lying murdered up-stairs, so he must have waited on the table himself, and you see the wine cooler is right close up to the other chair. I found this near it on the floor."

He produced the broken bit of amber and the inspector scrutinized it carefully.

"Part of a cigarette holder, eh? A mighty slender one, too, by the curve of this fragment. It looks as though a lady—"

He paused as McCarty picked up the broken cigarette from the table and silently handed it to him. It was but little thicker than a straw and bore in tiny square gold letters the initials E. C. C.

"They're the same as on the platinum case in the waistcoat pocket of the dead man in the other room there," McCarty remarked at length. "I've my opinion of a fellow that would call a thing like that a smoke, but no matter. Did you take a good look at the supper table, sir?"

"No dope there, beyond what you pointed out." Inspector Druet had turned away. "Let's have a look up-stairs before the rest go to it."

But he was too late, for even as he spoke the door of the next room opened and heavy footsteps could be heard crossing the rotunda and mounting the broad stairs. Like conspirators, the inspector and McCarty waited until they died away in the regions above.

"I wonder, now, what they did with the young crook I caught climbing out of the window?" McCarty queried aloud to himself.

"What's that?" Inspector Druet demanded.

Briefly McCarty recounted the events of the night and when he had concluded his companion started for the door leading into the hall once more.

"We'll have a look at the body, and then join the rest up-stairs. This is a headquarters job all right, Mac, and I'm going to take charge."

"I thought you would, sir." McCarty

heaved a sigh of satisfaction not unmixed with envy. "At least you'll not have Terhune with his scientific stunts and mechanical mind-readers butting in on this case."

"How about yourself?" The inspector halted and bent a quizzical gaze upon his companion. "Going to quit before the end of the first round?"

"Quit?" McCarty flushed. "Well, you know, sir, that I'm not in it except maybe to testify against the lad for breaking and entering. I've nothing to do with the murder nor the solving of it."

"But you're itching for a chance, aren't you, you old scout?" The other smiled. "I'll swear you in as a special officer to-morrow, just as I did on the last case you got yourself mixed up in since you left the force. Come on, now."

McCarty's eyes shone and he squared his massive shoulders with proud elation as they entered the room where the master of the house lay. He was officially at work again, and the inhabitants of the installment-plan suburban colony in which he had invested his savings and from which he drew his modest revenue might run the place to suit themselves until the case was finished. He was back in the old game!

When they opened the door of the study they found that its only occupants were the dead man and the wretched youth, who still cringed in his chair, to one arm of which he had now been securely handcuffed. At sight of the inspector's face he uttered a sharp ejaculation and cowered farther down.

"Well, well!" Inspector Druet searched his countenance keenly. "It seems to me we've met before, my friend."

"No, sir! Youse got me wrong—"

"Have I? We've got you mugged down at headquarters; I never forget a face. Have you done time? What's your name? Speak up!"

"Joe Bodansky," the youth muttered sullenly. "I did one stretch in de reform 'tory 'cause de gang I traveled wit' swiped some lead pipe, but I didn't have notin' to do wit' it! Dis is de foist toime—"

"Never mind; thought I had you right. I'll get your story down-town later." Inspector Druet turned to McCarty and in-

dicated the body. "Is this the way it was when you saw it first, Mac?"

"Yes. I was the third one to see it as far as we know; Joe, here, was first, then Clancy and then me. It don't look as if those flatfeet up-stairs had disturbed it any except that the gun was lying nearer to the hand, almost touching the fingers—this way."

McCarty stooped and moved the position of the pistol a trifle.

"He sure got his with a vengeance, didn't he?" the inspector remarked.

A quick gleam of light came into McCarty's own eyes.

"Maybe he did, sir," he vouchsafed.

"There seems to have been a bit of a struggle here; look, Mac," the other said suddenly.

The strip of tapestry which lay along the center of the refectory table had been pulled awry at the end near which the man had fallen and it was evident that only the heavy lamp which stood upon it had prevented it from being swept to the floor, but there were no other signs of disorder in the room.

"Yes, sir," McCarty agreed somewhat doubtfully. "He wouldn't have had time to catch at it in falling, after that shot hit him, but maybe whoever it was did it might have twisted that table cover in rage or excitement before they fired and killed him."

"And you think Creveling was the sort of man to stand calmly and wait without raising a hand to defend himself while his guest worked his own nerve up to the point of murder?" The inspector shrugged. "Come along, let's go up and see what the others have found out."

The patrol wagon clattered up to the entrance at that moment and Joe Bodansky, obviously relieved to be removed from the immediate vicinity of the dead man even in so grim and forbidding a vehicle, was consigned to the care of its officials.

After it had departed the inspector and his freshly appointed assistant mounted the great staircase to be met at the top by Clancy and two detectives from the borough headquarters. The latter were none too pleased to find an inspector from the

central office already on the job, but they concealed their chagrin with what diplomacy they could muster.

"Nothing doing up here, inspector," the senior of the twain announced. "We've looked in every hole and corner to the very roof and there isn't a soul about, living or dead. Nothin's been disturbed, either, and except for two or three of the servants' rooms it doesn't seem as if any of them had been occupied for some time, not even the master's own apartments."

"Mac, here, and I will just have a look around, anyway, and join you and Sam and Clancy below, Pete," Inspector Druet responded. "The commissioner has put me in charge, but I may need you both."

"Did you send the young crook off in the wagon, sir?" asked Clancy.

"Yes. He'll be taken care of, and I'll want your report on him later, but I understand you and McCarty are agreed that he had nothing to do with the main crime, the murder. Come, Mac."

As the rest descended to investigate the lower regions of the house, McCarty and the inspector crossed the wide corridor and entered the first room of a spacious suite on the left. It was evidently that of the mistress of the establishment, for the delicate lines of the furniture of the First Empire, the fragile ornaments and soft hues of the priceless rugs all betokened a feminine influence, although the toilet articles and similar objects of intimate daily use were missing and a slight smudge of dust lay here and there as if the effort to keep the rooms in order had of late been merely perfunctory.

### CHAPTER III.

#### A VOICE OVER THE WIRE.

"LOOKS as if the missis had been away, all right," McCarty observed. "I don't read the society columns as regularly as I might, not having moved in such circles as this before, but I guess we'll know where she is when the boys of the press get hold of this for an 'extra'."

The rooms across the hall were no less richly appointed, but as unmistakably mas-

culine in appearance as the first suite had been feminine. The furnishings were massive, the color scheme of walls and rugs and draperies dark, but boldly vivid, and despite its unstinted luxury the apartment bore an air of studied simplicity. Its rigid orderliness proclaimed that it, too, had not been occupied recently, but it was well aired and dusted as if in preparation for the immediate return of the owner.

In the lounging-room which opened off the bedchamber Inspector Druet approached an antique mahogany desk which stood in one corner and opened one drawer after another, while McCarty watched speculatively over his shoulders. They seemed to be filled with account books and miscellaneous correspondence mostly of a financial nature, and the latter was turning away when his superior paused with his hand upon the knob of the small drawer.

"Locked," he remarked succinctly. "And there isn't any keyhole."

"Then it works with a spring," McCarty suggested. "Million-a-month Creveling may not have dropped all his old philandering ways when he married, but he'd scarcely be likely to leave anything of a confidential nature in the place where his wife would first of all be looking for it, granted that she was of the looking kind."

"We have no time to bother with it now, at all events," the inspector remarked after several futile attempts to open the drawer. "I'll have an expert up here the first thing in the morning, but we had better be getting on through the house now; it's almost four o'clock."

Together they continued their inspection of the upper floors, but found nothing even remotely bearing on the investigation until they came to the topmost one, where the servants' quarters were evidently located. Here two connecting bedchambers and a third across the hall bore mute testimony, not only of occupation, but of hurried departure.

In the first room dresses and aprons of a plain, serviceable quality were scattered about, and in the adjoining one the half-opened closet door and drawers of the bureau revealed the habiliments of a butler dragged forth in obvious confusion.

The room on the other side of the landing was fitted out with a higher grade of furniture than the other two, worn but comparatively luxurious, as though the articles might have been relegated here from below stairs. An examination of the tailor's tabs on the suits which filled the clothes closet revealed that they had evidently been discarded from Creveling's own wardrobe.

"His valet, probably," McCarty hazarded. "The butler and one of the women servants must have occupied those rooms across the hall."

"That's obvious," retorted the inspector. "They may have been here last night and made a getaway when the murder was done, but if we can find the housekeeper's books we can get a line on who they were. The other rooms on this floor don't look as though they had been entered for weeks—"

"What's that?" McCarty suddenly raised a thick, stubby finger in warning and cocked his ear.

"What?" the other demanded in curt tones.

"I thought I heard a sound downstairs, sir. Not all the way, but on the first sleeping floor."

"One of those flatfeet from borough headquarters, I suppose," the inspector grunted. "I didn't hear anything; you must be getting nerves, Mac! That big room at the back may have been the housekeeper's. Let's have a look at it, anyway."

Obediently McCarty followed his superior down the hall, but as he did so he cast a swift glance at the stairs. Did he or did he not see a flitting shadow pause immovable just above the edge of the top step and then disappear?

Without comment he entered the room at the rear. The furniture was of walnut in severe lines, the rugs dark and spotless and the few pictures which broke the somber monotony of the gray wall-paper were of sedate, classic subjects.

A businesslike-looking desk stood near the window, but it was quite bare, and no intimate touches of human occupancy were visible save a tea-wagon covered with dusty porcelains drawn up beside the cold hearth.

"The housekeeper's room all right, I guess," remarked the inspector, as one after another he tried the drawers of the desk. "These are all locked and I don't see any keys about. It is pretty obvious that nobody has been in here, either, for some time. The whole thing looks funny to me, Mac. Of course, the three servants whose rooms have been occupied at least lately may have been left as caretakers while the family were away, but why did Creveling come back here just to give that little supper and get himself murdered after it—what in the world are you doing now?"

For McCarty was lifting the desk carefully, first from one side and then from the other, and shaking it tentatively when he had raised an end from the floor.

"Well," he replied at length. "There would be little object, wouldn't there, sir, in locking an empty desk? Of course, we could force the drawers, but I'm thinking it's small help you'd get from what's in here in solving the mystery down-stairs. The locks are rusty, too, as you'll notice. Did you try the dressing-table?"

"Yes. The drawers are unlocked and empty. There's nothing more here, Mac; let us go down now and see what the rest have discovered."

But it was evident that no discovery of any significance had been made.

Sam and Pete, the two detectives from the borough headquarters, together with the policeman Clancy, were standing in a little group near the body of the dead man in the study and the faces of all three bore an expression of stupefaction.

"Anything new turned up?" asked Inspector Druet crisply.

"No, sir. The kitchens are all in order though it's evident that they have been used lately but not for the supper that we found spread out in the next room. "Pete, the elder of the two detectives, replied: "That came from Mazzarini's, the caterer; his boxes are down in the pantry now."

"There's food and ice left in the refrigerators," the other detective, Sam, volunteered. "But it's not the kind of stuff the likes of him would eat."

He pointed with a grimy thumb at the

dead man and was evidently about to continue his remarks when the inspector demanded:

"Have any of you boys been up-stairs since we left you on the second floor?"

"No, sir." It was Clancy who answered. "There was nothing to take us up there, and plenty to look over down here, though it is little enough that we found out!"

"You see, Mac?" The inspector turned with a grin to McCarty. "I told you that you were hearing things when you thought there was a sound from below while we were on the servants' floor! Look here, Clancy, you've been on this beat nearly six months; you ought, to know about how many there were in the household."

"I think I do, sir, and I can't get it through my head where they've all gone to," responded the officer. "To my knowledge there were ten of them, not counting the housekeeper; the cook was the butler's wife, and besides there was a footman, valet and houseman, then the kitchenmaid, housemaid, parlormaid and laundress, and the lady's maid, of course. The valet I almost never saw, but it comes to me now that the cook and the butler are the only ones I've noticed around the premises for some time."

"What do you mean by 'some time'?" barked the inspector.

"Weeks, anyway, sir; maybe a month." Clancy shifted uneasily from one foot to the other. "Not since a few days after the last big entertainment the Crevelings gave."

"When was that? What sort of an entertainment?"

"How should I know, sir?" the officer replied to the last question. "'Twas a dinner or dance or something; awnings and a red carpet spread out to the curb and an orchestra playing till all hours, and a string of motor cars reaching around into both side streets. Except when they give some big society shindy-like that, the house is the quietest on the block, as I was remarking to McCarty only to-night—but where is he?"

Clancy had turned for superfluous corroboration to the spot where the exroundsman had stood behind his chief, to find that he had vanished.

"I thought that I heard the front door close just now, sir," Pete observed.

"You're getting jumpy, like Mac," the inspector laughed. "You couldn't drive him out of the house now that he's on the old trail again; wait till you boys retire and then open the papers some fine morning and find a fresh murder mystery staring you in the face and the force being raked over the coals for not pinching the man who did it, before the first edition reached the press! There isn't one of the three of you who wouldn't want to be back in harness with a chance to clasp his hand on the shoulder of the murderer! Mac's only poking around on his own account, but, Clancy, this looks bad for you; a prominent citizen shot to death in his own house on your beat with an army .44 that could be heard a mile off, and it took a cheap crook to discover the crime!"

Clancy turned a rich crimson.

"Everything was quiet and the house dark when I went my rounds up to near midnight, sir," he said with dignity. "We'd received no notification of the family being away or any special watch being necessary. Besides, there's a private watchman employed on this block, the same as on the others up and down the avenue. It did come to me as strange that I didn't run into him, but I thought no more about it. There's many a night I don't see him."

"You say that the house was dark up to nearly twelve o'clock," repeated Inspector Druet. "When did you notice first that it was lighted?"

"At about a quarter before; I rang in at the box on the next corner ten minutes afterward, more or less." Clancy's tone was cautious. "The faint little stream of light coming from the window here on the first floor meant nothing to me, for I'd often seen it till near dawn, and lots of the ground-floor windows are left open the night long in all the residences on my beat this mild spring weather. I passed regular, and not once did I hear the sound of a shot or anything else, for that matter, but the motor-cars going up and down the avenue."

"What was the first you knew of this affair, then?"

"When I heard a pounding on the sidewalk, as though some one was rapping for help. That must have been a little after two o'clock, and I was a couple of blocks away. I saw two figures standing under the lamp post out there and I came on the run. It was McCarty and the young second-story crook that he'd nabbed crawling out of the window here half a minute after he'd got in."

Clancy continued his narrative with impartial justice to the ex-member of the force and much dramatic detail as to his own finding of the body, and at its conclusion McCarty reappeared. He entered silently and took up a respectful position in the background, his face guilelessly stolid as the inspector went to the telephone and called for the chief medical examiner, turning in a brief report to headquarters.

"Did you find out anything, Mac?" asked Clancy anxiously, in an undertone.

McCarty shook his head.

"What could you find out in an empty house?" he countered evasively.

"Well, there's a smell on you as though you had been to some high-toned barber's, and Pete thought he heard the front door close a while back."

Clancy sniffed the air audibly, much as a dog on the scent, and McCarty's twinkling blue eyes narrowed for an instant as he backed slightly away from the other man.

"Barber's, is it?" he repeated, in great disdain. "I've been poking around the rooms upstairs, and some of them smell yet of perfumery; Pete must have heard me closing a door up there behind me, if he heard anything at all. It's a wonder you and the boys wouldn't get on the job and do something before the papers get hold of this, and you have a howling mob of reporters storming the house!"

"It's up to the inspector," retorted Clancy sullenly. Then his tone changed. "There's a bell ringing somewhere!"

Inspector Druet had turned sharply and the two detectives glanced at each other. There was silence for a moment and then the subdued but insistent peal was repeated.

"You answer it, Mac," the inspector ordered. "Try the front entrance door

first. The medical examiner or one of his assistants wouldn't have had time to get here, and it's five o'clock in the morning."

McCarty crossed the wide rotunda and even as he flung open the front door the bell rang once more through the silent house.

A middle-aged gentleman, small, but erect and dapper, despite the evident haste with which he had clothed himself, stood fuming at the threshold.

"Who are you?" he demanded peremptorily. "What is the meaning of this? Where is Mr. Creveling, and why have I been summoned from my bed at this unseemly hour? I insist upon an explanation!"

"Just a moment, sir." The inspector had followed McCarty and the latter stood aside. "I am afraid that before you get your explanation I must ask you who *you* are, and who summoned you. I am from police headquarters."

The little man shrank back aghast and his vandyke beard, tinged with gray, wagged in outraged amazement as McCarty shut the massive double doors behind him.

"'Police'!" he gasped. "What on earth has Eugene— I demand to see Mr. Creveling at once!"

"I am afraid that is impossible," Inspector Druet replied smoothly. "Will you answer my questions, please? What brings you here at what you yourself have admitted is an unusual hour?"

"'Unusual'!" the newcomer exploded. Then with an obvious effort he calmed himself and responded in dignified resentment:

"I am George Alexander, Mr. Creveling's banking partner, and the uncle and former guardian of Mrs. Creveling. That should be sufficient answer to you, sir. Will you inform me why I have been routed from my bed—"

"Who sent for you, Mr. Alexander? Who told you to come here?" The inspector's tone was deferential, but it held a note of unmistakable sternness.

"That is a point upon which I should like to be informed!" retorted the other. "I played my usual rubber of bridge at the club, went to my rooms and retired at

eleven. A few minutes ago I was aroused by my telephone and told that I was urgently needed here at once. I expostulated, but could gain no further information, so I dressed and came."

"Did you recognize the voice over the wire?"

Mr. Alexander paused thoughtfully and then replied with conviction:

"No. It was that of a man, of course, but it was totally strange to me, and when I demanded my informant's identity he hung up the receiver. I am quite sure I have never heard it before."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### INQUIRIES.

THE inspector turned involuntarily and glanced at his subordinate, but McCarty's face was blandly inscrutable.

"Mr. Alexander," began Inspector Druet, "your informant was unauthorized by the police department, and we have no more knowledge than you as to his identity, but your presence here is more than welcome in this emergency. Certain suspicious circumstances, the details of which you will learn later, caused an investigation of the house between the hours of two and three this morning by the regular officer on this beat. The premises were found to be deserted although a light was burning and the remains of supper for two are spread out in the breakfast room. In the study, or den, there lies the body of a man in evening clothes, shot through the heart, and it has been identified as that of Mr. Creveling."

"Eugene—shot!" the banker gasped. "Impossible! Good God, I cannot believe it! Why, only yesterday we had a long conference at the office! But who could have done this thing?"

"The pistol—an army .44—lies within touch of his fingers," replied the inspector.

"You mean to insinuate that he killed himself?" Mr. Alexander bristled, but he seemed to shrink even more within his light spring overcoat. "Ridiculous! What reason could he have for such an act? His affairs were never in better shape; the con-

ference at the office yesterday was in regard to a large loan we contemplated making which would have brought us in highly advantageous returns and he had no other problems or troubles, no entanglements of any kind!"

"Come and see him for yourself." The inspector turned and led the way to the study, with Mr. Alexander following and McCarty bringing up the rear. As they entered Clancy and the two detectives stepped aside, exposing the motionless form outstretched upon the floor, and with a shocked exclamation the banker recoiled.

"It is he! But Eugene never killed himself! Of that I am as sure as though I had been present when the deed was done!"

"Why are you so certain, Mr. Alexander?" the inspector asked.

"There could have been no reason," the other repeated. "No one ever loved life better than he nor knew how to enjoy it to the full. He had an unassailable position in the social and financial world, a beautiful wife, a host of friends—Oh, it is unthinkable!"

Yet the pistol is almost within his grasp," Inspector Druet reminded the banker. "Was he right or left-handed?"

"Right, but any one could have placed the weapon there after the crime was committed to make it look like a case of suicide," Alexander responded defensively. "Besides, who telephoned to me, and why?"

"That we must ascertain later." The inspector shrugged. "Do you recognize the pistol, Mr. Alexander? Have you ever seen it in Mr. Creveling's possession?"

"I have not, sir." The banker shook his head decisively. "It may have been his, of course. A man whose home was filled with valuable objects of art and whose wife's jewels constituted a huge fortune in themselves, would be naturally supposed to guard against burglary, but he could have had no personal reason for such an article of self-protection."

The sound of another motor-car outside and the ringing of the front door bell put a stop for the time being to any further questioning by the inspector, and as one of the assistants of the chief medical examiner

was ushered in, the dead man's partner turned to McCarty.

"Are you one of those in charge here? If so, for God's sake, take me out of this for a while! I can't stand it! The shock—"

"Come this way, sir. They'll call if you're needed." He drew the banker out to the hall and into the breakfast-room, where he switched on the light once more and pulled forward a chair suggestively with its back to the disordered supper table. "Sit here, Mr. Alexander, and rest yourself. I'm not connected with the police force, if that's what you mean; I just happened by, and I'm a friend of the inspector. It must have been a terrible shock to you, as you say, to find the house deserted and Mr. Creveling killed like this!"

"The abrupt summons over the telephone was startling enough, but to lose my partner in this hideous, tragic way!" The banker sank into the chair and pressed his delicate, blue-veined hands over his eyes for a moment.

"I think, sir, you said that Mrs. Creveling was your niece?" McCarty asked slyly.

Mr. Alexander's hands dropped and he gazed at the other in a dazed fashion.

"Yes. She was my late brother's only child, and my ward until her marriage to Eugene eight years ago. It will be a most—most distressing home coming for her. By Jove, we must wire her at once! I had forgotten—"

"Mrs. Creveling is away?" McCarty's ingenuous blue eyes opened still wider. "That is why, then, that the house was all deserted."

He added the last as if to himself, but the dazed look faded partially from Mr. Alexander's eyes and a shade as of caution crept into them.

"Mrs. Creveling has been paying a round of visits on Long Island for the last few weeks and Mr. Creveling has been living much at the club since his presence was required almost constantly in town on this banking matter we were arranging to negotiate." His explanation came with nervous haste. "I believe two or three of the servants were left here temporarily as caretakers, though; I cannot imagine where

they may have gone. However, Mrs. Creveling must be sent for at once! May I ask that you will arrange with the inspector to have one of those men in there dispatch a wire immediately to her in care of Mrs. Douglas Waverly, Broadmead, Long Island?"

"And what shall we say in the telegram, sir?" asked McCarty, as he prepared to comply. "You don't want to tell her in cold blood that her husband has been shot, do you?"

"Heavens, no!" The little man recoiled. "Just explain that a serious accident has occurred and her immediate return is imperatively necessary. I—I cannot think! I confess that I find it almost impossible to pull myself together! This horrible thing—"

"I understand, sir." McCarty's tone was full of respectful sympathy, but he paused with his hand on the door knob. "I wonder, now, you knowing Mr. Creveling so well, if you'd remember whether or not he smoked his cigarettes with an amber mouthpiece?"

"An amber mouthpiece?" the other repeated in unguarded surprise at the petty, irrelevant question. "No, he never used a holder of any sort. But the telegram—"

"I'll see that it goes at once, Mr. Alexander." McCarty closed the door behind him, and when he entered the room where the medical examiner's assistant was concluding his grim business the ex-roundsman's face did not betray by the flicker of an eyelash that he had stumbled on a clue, albeit a slender one. The inspector drew him aside at once.

"Creveling has been dead at least four hours," he announced. "The doc seems to think he shot himself, although he wants an autopsy for form's sake, and it's just as well. We'll let it go at that for a day or two anyway, till we've something to spring on the Old Man. Where's Alexander?"

"In the next room. He wants a telegram sent at once to Mrs. Creveling. It seems that she's visiting a Mrs. Douglas Waverly at Broadmead, Long Island."

McCarty rapidly detailed the substance of his brief talk with Alexander and of the message to be sent and one of the detectives

was dispatched to the nearest telegraph office. The medical examiner's assistant also took his departure after arranging for the removal of the body for a formal autopsy and the inspector and McCarty returned to the breakfast-room.

"Mr. Alexander," Inspector Druet recommenced his interrogation without any preamble. "My friend, here, says that you told him Mrs. Creveling had been visiting on Long Island for several weeks and her husband living at the club. Was he in the habit of returning here to his home to give midnight suppers when it was virtually closed and the staff of servants away?"

George Alexander, whom they had found standing by the table frowningly contemplating the debris of the supper, turned and faced them at the question.

"I know little of my late partner's habits," he replied stiffly. "In our banking business we deal with many foreign powers, among the representatives of which each of us has his own particular clients, and not until all the preliminary negotiations have been concluded do we have a general conference. Mr. Creveling and I are known to have arranged several international loans of a confidential nature—you know how such affairs creep out through the underground channels of diplomacy—and it is quite probable that he may have brought a prospective client here to-night rather than to a restaurant or club in order to insure privacy. Is it not at least probable, also, that after the departure of his guest he may have been attacked by burglars? You gentlemen of the police know that many an army pistol is now in the hands of a member of what I believe you term the 'underworld'."

The inspector shrugged.

"The medical examiner who has been here affirms that Mr. Creveling shot himself," he observed. "Mr. Alexander, you said that Mr. Creveling had no troubles of any sort. This may seem like an impertinent question, but we must know the truth, and it is bound to come out in the end. Was he in no domestic difficulty? He and his wife seem to have been virtually living apart and the house left in the hands of caretakers—"

"Nothing of the sort!" the banker interrupted indignantly. "I am of an older generation, an older school than was Eugene, and their friends were not mine, but his wife was my niece and I should have been the first to know of any discord. To my mind they were a model, modern couple, independent in thought and action, but mutually considerate, and I can assure you that a very real affection existed between them. My partner was a man's man, caring little for society, although his wife reveled in it. This was perfectly understood by their friends and the house here was frequently left in the hands of caretakers, especially in the spring and autumn when my niece—Mrs. Creveling—made a round of country house visits and Eugene preferred his club to an empty house, naturally."

"You say their friends were not yours, that they moved in a different set," the inspector interposed. "You must, however, have heard your partner and your niece mention from time to time those with whom they were most intimate."

Mr. Alexander's lips closed in a tight line.

"Mrs. Creveling was twenty at the time of their marriage and ceased to be my ward a year later; Mr. Creveling and I seldom discussed anything but business."

"How long have you and Mr. Creveling been in partnership?"

Mr. Creveling stroked his beard for a moment in hesitation before he replied:

"Since about the time of his marriage to my niece, although his family and ours have known each other for generations."

"Had Mr. Creveling been engaged actively in any financial pursuits prior to that?" Inspector Druet continued.

"I cannot say that he had, beyond speculating now and then in the market," the banker answered with yet more obvious reluctance. "But I really do not comprehend the significance of these questions at such a time as this. Mr. Creveling was a very rich man, but naturally the prospect of marriage made him ambitious to become something more than a—er—mere art dilettante—"

"And Broadway spender?" broke in McCarty irrepressibly.

Mr. Alexander's eyes shifted.

"I presume you refer to the unfortunate sobriquet of Mr. Creveling's college days, and which erroneously clung to him for years after he had reached maturity," he said. "Irresponsible youth and the possession of too much money have formed a dangerous combination before now, but my partner has been unknown in the bright light district, save at an occasional theater party with his wife and their friends, for several years."

"Mr. Alexander," the inspector bent forward suddenly, "when I asked you just now if you knew who Mr. and Mrs. Creveling's intimates were, you evaded the question; in the face of this tragedy they are bound to be discovered and fully investigated. You said also that you seldom discussed anything but business with your partner and that your guardianship of his wife ended a year after their marriage. Does that mean, too, that your social relationship with them was interrupted? That, in fact, there was any estrangement between you and them?"

"Most assuredly not!" The banker squared his somewhat narrow shoulders. "My niece made her home with me prior to her marriage and the greatest possible affection has always existed between us. As their only relative I have been a frequent visitor here, but I have already told you that their friends are in a different circle—"

As he spoke the slow, measured tread of heavy feet in the hall outside told of the temporary departure of Eugene Creveling from his home, before his final return for the brief scene in which he would be the principal but silent actor, and involuntarily his late partner paused, shuddering again.

The remaining detective from borough headquarters appeared in the doorway, with Clancy behind him, and both stood awaiting further orders.

"There's nothing more for either of you to do here now," the inspector announced. "Sam, have your report sent in to me down-town; Clancy, make your own to the Old Man and I'll look it over later. If that young crook tries to get hold of a

shyster lawyer, ask the commissioner to stall him and keep him quiet until I get back to Center Street myself."

As the two men turned to go, McCarty went to the door.

"You'll not be needing me now for a bit, inspector?" The statement was a question asked with the ingratiating which only the ex-roundsman could command. "I'll have another look over the ground—" "Go as far as you like, Mac," Inspector Druet responded heartily, then turned once more to Mr. Alexander. "Who were the Crevelings' intimate friends, as far as you know? This Mrs. Douglas Waverly, for instance, whom Mrs. Creveling is visiting; do you know anything about her?"

The banker smiled slightly in a somewhat relieved fashion.

"She was born a Preston, of Washington." He spoke as though that was sufficient answer in itself. "Her husband is the son of old Monro Waverly, the tight-fisted Scot who developed a passion for speculation late in life, in the eighties and amassed millions. Besides Broadmead, the Douglas Waverlys have a town house a block or two below here."

## CHAPTER V.

### THE NINE OF DIAMONDS.

"WHO were the others in the Creveling set?"

"An Irish aristocrat, if there be such a thing left, named O'Rourke, and his wife, whom I believe has a title in her own right, but refuses to use it, at least in this country; then there is a Mr. and Mrs. Ford, and I believe a Mrs. Culp or Kip, or some such name—really, you must ask my niece—"

"We'll leave her out of it for the time being," the inspector interrupted crisply. "You said that Creveling was a man's man; who were his associates?"

"He belonged to most of the best clubs in town, but I am not in a position to tell you with whom he associated." The note of defense was again evident in the banker's tones. "If he had any hobby beyond an innate love of beautiful things and a

desire to acquire them, I never learned it, and I have found that it is only through a knowledge of a man's hobbies or predilections that one can gauge the type of individual to whom he would naturally be drawn as a congenial companion."

Mr. Alexander halted suddenly as though he had said too much, and the inspector glanced at him sharply.

"It did not occur to you to interest yourself in your partner's companions and mode of life outside of his family and business?" he asked.

"Why should it have?" the other countered defiantly. "My niece's married life with him appeared to be ideal, according to modern standards, our partnership was successful and without friction of any sort, and I was content. My own social interests, as I have told you, lay with an older, more staid school; a quiet round of golf or rubber of bridge, an occasional opera night or evening with my books or friends of my own generation; that for years has been my life after banking hours, inspector."

Inspector Druet frowned thoughtfully.

"Conservative, eh? Why, then, Mr. Alexander, were you willing to enter into partnership with a man who you admit had no knowledge of business even if he was the husband of your niece?"

Once more a dull flush swept over the features of the dapper little man before him.

"I consider that question an impertinence, sir, but I have no reason to evade a reply to it except a natural aversion to discussing my private affairs with those with whom they can have no possible concern. I have already told you that prior to our entrance into partnership Mr. Creveling had speculated occasionally in Wall Street. Since he was to marry my ward I watched his operations, and conceived a sincere admiration for his acumen. I realized that although he did not know the banking business, I could trust his judgment; he brought the necessary capital into our concern and I the experience. It was an ideal combination which to-night's tragedy has so unfortunately broken."

"I see." The inspector nodded. "Was there any connection, Mr. Alexander, be-

tween that partnership and your niece's marriage? To put it bluntly, was the partnership a stipulation of the alliance? Mrs. Creveling was your ward; had she any fortune of her own?"

"You go too far, sir!" Mr. Alexander's eyes flashed. "The marriage was a love match; because of that alone I consented to it. Mrs. Creveling's fortune was not great, but there is no older family than ours in America, and had she desired she could have made a far more brilliant alliance, in spite of Mr. Creveling's money. I—I decline absolutely to answer any more of your questions until I learn my rights in this affair. I do not understand the trend of this interrogation, nor do I consider it pertinent to the crime you are investigating. For it is a crime, no matter what your assistant medical examiners or any other so-called officials of the police department may assume. Eugene Creveling was murdered!"

"I beg pardon, sir!" A voice whose studied deferentiality was evident even in the shocked accents which now punctuated it was heard behind them, and both men turned. In the doorway stood a thin, smooth-faced individual of perhaps thirty-five, and upon his austere, almost clerical features deep concern struggled with curiosity and alarm. "I have just returned—arrived, I should say—in accordance with Mr. Creveling's instructions, but he is not in his room. I hope nothing is wrong, sir? I knocked, but you did not reply, and I could not avoid hearing—"

"Oh, it's you, Frank!" Mr. Alexander spoke with obvious relief at the other's appearance, although his tone was fittingly lugubrious. "I regret to inform you that something very terrible has happened to your master. This is an inspector from police headquarters—"

"Who are you?" Inspector Druet stepped forward.

"Mr. Creveling's man, sir. Frank Hill is my name." The valet's tone was still respectful, but there was a shade less of deference in it, although he spoke nervously.

"When did you last see your employer alive?"

"At eleven o'clock this—last night, sir, in his room at the club."

"Where have you been since then?"

The man wet his thin lips and replied in a low, hesitating voice:

"On a private matter. My time was my own, sir, I—I had rather not say."

Meanwhile McCarty had taken advantage of his superior's offhanded permission and slipped back into the study immediately after the body had been removed and Clancy and the detectives had taken their departure.

Save for the dark stains upon the rug where the shattered head had rested, and the strip of tapestry pulled awry from its accustomed place upon the refectory table, there were no visible signs left to the casual eye of the tragedy which had so recently taken place within those four walls, but McCarty closed the door carefully behind him and stood for a moment with his back against it surveying the room.

The chairs, with their adjacent smoking-stands, the bookcases, davenports, and every article of furniture which the room contained, passed in swift but unerring detail before his vision and he whistled softly.

A delicate spring dawn was filtering in through the diaphanous curtains of the windows at the rear, and turning the golden glow of the electric lights a sickly lemon yellow; why had the shades not been lowered and the thick draperies which hung on either side of the casements been drawn?

McCarty switched off the lights, and striding over to the nearest window, thrust aside the curtains and opened it. The explanation for the disregard of possible on-lookers was instantly apparent, for a sheer blank brick wall rose before him about six feet distant. He glanced swiftly each way, and then withdrew his head, leaving the window open that the gentle breeze might drift through the room. The blank space, or alley, had no opening at either end, and had evidently been left when the Creveling residence was built in order to give light to its rear windows.

Yet the house was practically in the middle of the block, and beyond that brick wall could lie only the back yards of the

buildings which faced on the side streets. Had Creveling caused that high blank barrier to be erected on the edge of his property for the purpose of insuring absolute privacy to the rooms which looked out upon it? The front of the house was no more carefully secluded from outside observation than were the others in the neighborhood; why should the rear have been thus shut away from prying eyes?

His mind still busied with the problem McCarty moved slowly about the study, measuring with a practised gaze the distance between the various articles of furniture until he came to the long, narrow table between the two davenports which flanked the hearth. Here he paused, and taking the edge of the twisted strip of tapestry between his forefinger and thumb, began almost mechanically to straighten it.

As he lifted it a gleam of something white against the age-darkened wood of the table top caught his eye, and thrusting the tapestry hastily aside he disclosed a small, highly glazed oblong upon which were spots of red. It was a playing card, the nine of diamonds, but superimposed upon its regular scarlet lozengers were tiny blotches of dull crimson, unmistakable in their significance.

McCarty picked it up gingerly, and saw that it was torn half across its face; the crimson spots were fast turning a murky brown, and a smudge which resembled the imprint of a finger was plainly discernible near one side. The card itself was of the most expensive grade of linen, gilt-edged, and despite its sinister stains had obviously come from a new deck. The back was of a peculiar design, printed in rich colors and gold, after the manner of the ancient illuminated text, and McCarty studied it with minute care, fixing the pattern in his mind. Then he crossed to the writing table between the windows, and opening a drawer, selected an envelope and placed the card within it.

This he slipped into his pocket, and then began a close and exhaustive search of the room, albeit he shook his head dubiously as he did so. How that single blood-stained playing-card happened to have been slipped under the edge of that strip

of tapestry he could not fathom, nor what its significance might be, but he felt certain that the rest of the deck would not be brought to light within those four walls. His supposition proved to be a correct one, for he found no playing-cards nor games of any description save a set of rare old ivory chessmen which he unearthed from a lower drawer of one of the bookcases. He took a final survey of the room and opened the door to return to the inspector, when just as he did so he beheld a dark, clerical-appearing form noiselessly pass across the hall from the other side of the staircase.

It halted before the door of the breakfast-room for an appreciable minute, as though listening intently, then opened it, and McCarty heard a deferential voice utter the conventional: "I beg pardon, sir!"

There was a murmur of indistinguishable words, and the man passed within, closing the door behind him. In his turn, McCarty advanced to it and listened, and so it came that he heard the inspector's questions and learned the identity of the intruder. At the valet's refusal to state his whereabouts during the night, McCarty quietly entered.

"Possibly not." The inspector's curt tones held a hint of menace. "Your preference, however, will not be consulted, and I warn you that you had better be candid with us now."

"Perhaps," Mr. Alexander's thin, nervous tones broke in, "it would be best to wait until Mrs. Creveling arrives."

To McCarty's keen gaze it seemed that a glance of warning shot from the eyes of Creveling's late partner to the valet, but the latter's demeanor did not change even as Inspector Druet turned wrathfully upon the author of the suggestion.

"I am conducting this inquiry, sir!" he thundered. Then to the man before him he added: "Your employer has been found dead, shot through the heart. Do you still persist in your refusal—?"

"Mr. Creveling dead!" The valet started back a step or two. "I—I overheard Mr. Alexander say something about 'murder,' as I stopped at the door just now, but I didn't think—! This is horrible! Who—who shot him?"

He passed one hand across his lips as though to hide some uncontrollable evidence of emotion, but his eyes were fixed watchfully, unchangingly upon his interrogator.

"That is what we are endeavoring to ascertain," retorted the inspector. "Did you know of your employer's intention to come here to his house last night?"

"Yes, sir." The valet had hesitated for a shade of a second. "I was here earlier in the evening; it was I who received the caterer's men and arranged the table for supper."

McCarty smiled to himself. The man Hill was on the defensive, and his very caution was proving his own undoing.

"Who was Mr. Creveling's guest?"

The curt question seemed to vibrate on the air like the echo of a single sharp note struck upon a gong, and the face of George Alexander tensed visibly as he waited for its reply, but the valet merely shrugged.

"I do not know, sir."

"You did not remain, then, to wait upon the table?"

"No, sir. As I have said, I went to Mr. Creveling at his club."

"You did not return here?"

"Not until ten minutes ago." The valet's voice rang out firmly.

"When you saw Mr. Creveling at his club did he mention who was to be his guest here? Did he at any time say anything which would lead you to infer the identity of this person?"

"He did not, sir." Hill's tone was still firm, but for a moment his eyes shifted and then returned as inscrutable as ever to those of the inspector.

"Where have you been staying since Mr. Creveling has made his home at his club?"

"Here, sir." It was evident that the valet intended to render no assistance to the inquiry beyond the terse and literal replies demanded of him, but Inspector Druet persisted.

"You were acting as caretaker also?"

"No, sir. Two of the other servants—Rollins and his wife, the butler and cook—remained here for that; the rest of the staff except Mrs. Creveling maid were dismissed

when Mrs. Creveling went to the country and Mr. Creveling to his club."

The inspector exchanged a significant glance with McCarty, who still hovered quietly in the background.

"Mrs. Creveling usually left home for such protracted periods, and always dismissed practically her entire staff?"

Again there was that shade of hesitation, and then the valet responded:

"No, sir. The staff was usually retained at half pay when it was intended to reopen the house again within a short time, but I understand that this season Mr. and Mrs. Creveling had made other plans."

"What other plans?"

Once more the valet shrugged.

"I cannot say, sir, except that some mention was made of traveling. I have received no instructions for the future; I feel sure, though, that I was not to be dismissed or Mr. Creveling would have said something to me about it."

"How long have you been in Mr. Creveling's employment?"

"For eleven years, sir."

Inspector Druet suddenly changed the tenor of his questioning.

"The butler and cook are not in the house. When did you see them here last?"

"Yesterday afternoon." Frank Hill shifted his weight from one foot to the other, the first sign of nervousness which he had displayed throughout the interview save his momentary shock at the intelligence of his master's death and the manner of it.

"They are not in the house now. Do you know where they have gone?"

"No, sir." There was no surprise in the valet's tone, but a sort of defiant reserve beneath the slightly ironic deference which obviously nettled the inspector.

"You knew, however, that they were to be absent last night? I want the story, Hill. No hedging!"

"Rollins, the butler, told me that Mr. Creveling had given him and his wife a holiday, but they were to be back early this morning to prepare for Mrs. Creveling's homecoming."

"Home-coming?" repeated Inspector Druet sharply. "You said just now—"

"I beg pardon, sir." The quiet voice forestalled him. "I meant to say that the house was not to be reopened again with the staff this season. In a manner of speaking, it is never closed when the caretakers are here, and some one is always left in charge. I understood that Mrs. Creveling was to return this morning with her maid for a few days of preparation before starting upon her journey with Mr. Creveling. The butler and cook, Yvonne—the maid—and myself could, of course, have given sufficient service if no entertaining were contemplated."

## CHAPTER VI.

### GUARDED ANSWERS.

THE inspector meditated for a moment.

"Why did Mr. Creveling give the butler and cook a holiday yesterday, of all times, when he intended to receive some one here for supper last night?" he asked finally. "Supposing the meal were to be supplied from a caterer's, why did he not require the services of the butler to wait upon the table?"

"As though he realized the slip he had made, the valet's eyes sought those of Creveling's late partner, but Mr. Alexander avoided them studiously."

"I can't say, sir," Hill responded at length. "Mr. Creveling told me nothing beyond my own instructions."

"Was it usual for your employer during his wife's absence to clear all the servants out of the house in order to entertain here?"

At the question and its implication Hill's color changed, but his eyes once more met those of the inspector levelly.

"I do not know that Mr. Creveling ever did that, sir; I mean, purposely. He frequently had one or more gentlemen here to supper when Mrs. Creveling was away. Sometimes the butler waited upon them, sometimes I did. I think he gave Rollins and his wife a holiday before I asked permission to have the night to myself on this occasion."

Inspector Druet evaded the issue of the

valet's own movements during the hours which had passed since eleven by asking:

"Did Mr. Creveling ever entertain ladies also on these occasions?"

"During Mrs. Creveling's absence?" There was a note of shocked incredulity in the servant's tones as if he could scarcely believe that he had understood the question. "Indeed no, sir! They were strictly stag suppers."

"Who were the gentlemen Mr. Creveling entertained here, then?" the inspector continued. "What were their names?"

"Rollins can tell you that better than I can, sir," Hill temporized. "He usually waited upon them; it was only occasionally that I took his place, and then the gentlemen were sometimes strangers to me; business acquaintances of Mr. Creveling's."

"You don't know the name of a single gentleman who ever had supper here with Mr. Creveling alone?" The inspector's tone had sharpened again.

"Of course, sir, a few of them. They were all personal friends of long standing, those I did know; Mr. O'Rourke has been here once or twice, and Mr. Waverly and Mr. Cutter. I can't recall them all at the moment, sir."

McCarty, unable to contain himself longer, coughed with elaborate ostentation, and after a quick side glance at him the inspector nodded.

"Mac, show this man where the body was found. No, Mr. Alexander!" he added the last as the banker started forward nervously. "There are a few more questions I wish to ask you. Wait here, please."

Mr. Alexander sank back with an air of hopeless vexation.

"Then I trust that you will be brief!" he snapped. "I know nothing, as I told you in the beginning, which could help you in any way, and this ghastly affair has been an inexpressible shock to me. When my niece arrives I must meet her with the news of her tragic bereavement and assume control of the situation as the head of the family, and I cannot do so without an opportunity to pull myself together, to—bear up under my own natural grief."

The door closed upon the thin, testy

tones, and the thought crossed McCarty's mind that the banker's emotion was somewhat tardy in finding expression, but his grimly determined face gave no indication of the idea as he piloted his charge to the study.

"'Twas there the body was found," McCarty explained as he pointed to the dark stain upon the rug, and then added with seeming irrelevance. "What did they do, Hill, at these stag parties you were telling the inspector about? Play cards?"

Before McCarty's good-natured but keen scrutiny the valet seemed to have lost a trifle of the assurance which he had maintained in the presence of the inspector, and now he blinked, staring as if fascinated at the sinister spot upon the floor.

"No. They just ate and drank and smoked."

"What did they talk about?"

The man, Hill, raised sullen, resentful eyes at the question.

"It was not my place to listen to the conversation," he responded tartly. "I served them when Rollins wasn't here to do it, and minded my own business. That's all I know."

"You'll find you're minding your own business best now, my man, if you'll speak up and come clean!" McCarty admonished sternly. "You told the inspector in there that Mr. Creveling said never a word to you about last night beyond giving you your instructions; what were they?"

The valet moistened his thin lips.

"He told me that he was having a guest here for supper; that I was to be here at six when the caterer's men arrived and arrange everything, and then bring him a bag of clean linen at the club at eleven."

"And when did he tell you this?" McCarty's eyes had narrowed.

"Yesterday morning."

"Where?"

"Here. He came for some papers before going down to his office, and gave me some other instructions about his clothes; he didn't like the valet service at the club."

"And what club was this where he was staying?" McCarty asked.

"The Marathon."

"Why didn't he stay in his own home if

there were three of you here to look after him?"

The valet's shoulders and eyebrows lifted expressively.

"I never asked him, and he didn't tell me, but I suppose he liked the club better than any empty house; any gentleman would." For the first time Hill looked squarely at his inquisitor. "Who are you? A detective?"

"I'm a special officer on this case, and my name's McCarty," the ex-roundsman replied. "You'll be only saving yourself trouble."

"McCarty!" Hill interrupted, and there was something very like consternation in his tones. "You're the McCarty who was in all the papers in connection with the Hoyos case and the Glamorgan affair?"

"I am that!" There was no braggadocio in Timothy McCarty's plain, matter-of-fact statement. "Now, Hill, how long had you been in the house before you knocked at the door of the room where the inspector and Mr. Alexander were?"

"Only a minute or two, sir." The tone was almost eager, now, and the habitual servility had returned to it. "I let myself in at the tradesmen's entrance with my own key as usual, and went up-stairs to get a couple of hours' sleep before Rollins and his wife returned and it would be time to bustle about and get the house in order for Mrs. Creveling's coming. I started up the back way, of course, and at the second floor I thought I'd stop and see if Mr. Creveling was in his room; he usually slept home instead of going back to the club when he'd any one here for a late supper, and when I found nobody there I supposed maybe his guest hadn't gone yet and I'd better come down and see if they wanted any more wine or anything. Mr. Creveling's private cellar is stocked up for two or three years yet to come. I went down the front staircase and heard voices in the room where I'd laid out the supper table, so I knocked."

"You thought Mr. Creveling was still in there?" McCarty queried blandly. "I mean, when you stopped and listened before you knocked?"

"I didn't know what to think!" he blurted out after a moment's hesitation. "I heard Mr. Alexander's voice and recognized it, of course, but for all I knew he might have been the guest Mr. Creveling was entertaining. Then he said something about murder and a strange voice answered. You know the rest, sir; I'm giving it to you straight!"

"You've been with Million-a-month Creveling for eleven years," McCarty remarked slowly, using the nickname with deliberate intent. "That's three years before his marriage. You may have come through with all you know about to-night's affair, Hill, but you've only done it because we dug it out of you. There's a lot more you know about the man you've been working for, and I'm going to have it."

"There's been nothing since his marriage that all the world don't know, and precious little before that, thanks to the reporters that were forever barking at his heels because he was a free-handed spender and liked a good time!" the valet retorted. "I'm not saying Mr. Creveling was any angel in his younger days, but there's nothing you can hang on him now."

"I disremember just now what and all the scandal used to be about him, but a look at the old newspaper files will give me a line on that." McCarty spoke as though to himself, but he watched the other narrowly. "'Twas the usual thing, I suppose; wine and women and horses and cards. The first of them at least he didn't give up when he married, by your own testimony; but how about the last? Has Creveling been gambling heavy lately, that you know of?"

Hill shook his head decisively.

"He hasn't touched a card in years, at least not that I've heard of. He never even sat in at Mrs. Creveling's bridge parties. After he married and settled down he started in antique collecting; not paintings so much, but rugs and tapestries and porcelains and rare old books. Regular passion it got to be with him, and he studied up on periods and such, but then he was always a natural judge of good things, Mr. Creveling was."

McCarty pondered for a moment. The

other man's expression was as inscrutable as ever, but there had seemed to be a thinly veiled double meaning in his last remark. Why had he been so obviously on the defensive since the beginning of the interrogation? He was shrewd and intelligent above the average of his class; surely he must realize the equivocal position in which he stood with the inspector after his open defiance and refusal to state where he had himself been during those crucial hours! McCarty tried another lead.

"This house has a kind of a new look to it, in spite of all the old things Creveling collected," he observed. "When was it built?"

"At the time of his marriage, sir; he built it for his bride. There's not a residence of its size on the Avenue to compare with it."

"And 'twas him put up that high blank wall at the back?" asked McCarty. "Why?"

"I never heard him say, sir. I suppose he preferred it to the back courts of the side street houses." The reserve deepened once more in Hill's tones. "It may have been Mrs. Creveling who suggested it; I cannot say."

"Did anybody ever die here before?" McCarty's own tones had lowered.

"Die?" The valet started nervously.

"In this house, I mean. Has there been a death here since it was built?"

"No, not until this!"

"That's funny. I never heard of a new house with never a death in it that sported a ghost before." McCarty seemed again to be reflecting aloud, and for a moment there was silence while the other eyed him askance. At length he resumed: "You used your own latch-key in coming in a while ago; who else have keys to the house?"

"I don't know." The valet spoke in evident relief. "Rollins, of course, and his wife. The rest of the staff were supposed to turn theirs in to the housekeeper when they left, but they may have had duplicates made. The housekeeper went back to Scotland a month ago when the es-

tablishment was closed and Mrs. Creveling started visiting, but I don't know what became of the keys."

"I suppose you do know, though, what you're letting yourself in for by refusing to tell where you have been since eleven o'clock?" inquired McCarty. "You are the last so far as we know to have seen Creveling alive, you had a key to come and go as you please, and you won't try to make out an alibi for yourself. It's liable to go hard with you."

"Maybe," Hill commented without bravado; but there was a peculiar glint in his swiftly lowered eyes. "If you're on this case, Mr. McCarty, it's for you and the inspector to prove that I was here after eleven, not for me to prove that I wasn't. I know American law, sir."

In spite of his respectful tone there was a covert challenge in it which McCarty grimly accepted.

"You've had reason to, maybe," he retorted significantly. "You've nothing more to add to what you've told the inspector and me? Then we'll just go back—"

A heavy, dull thud sounding from the main hall broke into his sentence, and with a common impulse both men turned to the door. McCarty reached it first, and opening it, stepped mechanically outside just as the inspector and Mr. Alexander issued from the breakfast-room.

Across the rotunda, flooded with a mingling of pale sunshine and the more brazen electric lights, the four men beheld a figure which momentarily held them spellbound. A few steps from the main entrance doors which had just closed behind her a woman stood looking from one to another of them. Ash-blond hair above deep violet eyes peeped from beneath her motor hood and tall, statuesque form, swathed in a long satin coat which revealed rather than concealed its splendid lines, was drawn up to its full height as she regarded them for a long minute in a silence which none of them seemed inclined to break.

At last her lips moved:

"What is it, please? What has happened to my husband?"

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.



# The Brazen Serpent

By H. Bedford-Jones

**Y**OU seek a new type of detective story—something unhackneyed, something differing from the murder-clue-underworld stuff? Very good. I beg to submit the case of the brazen serpent and the mysterious heathen who wore spectacles.

It is true that for some years poor devils of authors have racked their brains inventing unhackneyed detective stories; have delved into realms of science and art and magic and even humanity; and have in the end accomplished nothing. How should they? From the time the first detective story was written—you will find it in the Book of Genesis—the model has not been improved upon. That model reached up into heaven and down into hell, and centered its plot upon a stolen apple. Nothing could be simpler; nothing could be more comprehensive. Imagine the fine simplicity of that stolen apple as a plot motive! A murder would have spoiled the whole story.

A real detective yarn, then, must involve one who detects. Let us look at Bixby Thornton; his work in this matter of the brazen serpent is remarkable in the annals of detection. He was a quiet man, with years of experience in the narcotics squad of the revenue service. He confided in no one except his wife, a mute, inglorious *Watson* of the hearth who kept no records.

When John Duck appeared upon his horizon, Thornton was enjoying his annual vacation, and the police very gladly let him, as a Federal man, work upon the mystery. Thornton, in fact, first discovered the thing.

He was letting himself in at the side door. Something warm splashed on his hand, and as he stepped into the dimly lighted vestibule, he saw that it had made a crimson splotch. He stared at it dully for a moment; then stepped back outside, leaving the door open. There in the light, half washed from the stones by the evening rain, was a thin seepage of red.

It came, of course, from above. Thornton saw that there was a light in the oriel windows where the Chinaman lived, on the second floor. For a moment he was oppressed by the hideous thought that John Duck had cut his throat and was lying up there in the peak of the room by the oriel windows—

Then he saw, as he looked up, a flutter of the blinds, an up-and-down movement as they were drawn more closely. Frowning, he passed into the house, rubbed his hand dry on his overcoat, and said nothing of the odd occurrence to his wife.

## II.

THE house in which Bixby Thornton lived had been built some time in the eighties, and was just off Gramercy Park. Thornton did not live here because of the historic atmosphere; it mattered nothing to him that the Players' Club was a stone's throw away, or that his house had lately been the residence of a real poet. He lived here because the rent was low, and because the upper floor could be steadily sub-leased to John Duck at a profitable figure.

It was a dingy old house, full of disrepair and genteel negligence. There was an elevator which had normally but three stops—basement, first floor, and second floor. Not infrequently, however, the elevator would halt *en route*, and only a certain cunning shake of the cable would persuade it to continue its course. Even John Duck, who had been established in his present quarters long before Thornton took over the house, usually preferred the stairs.

John Duck was something of a genial mystery. A small, urbane man, slightly saffron in hue, he wore large round spectacles edged with black shell. On the street, he always wore an English walking-suit; what he wore in his rooms, nobody knew. He was invariably dapper, smiling, polite.

Bixby Thornton had seen John Duck's rooms only once. He had gained a confused impression of heathen deities, gilded and unpleasant; of the largest chamber, that which contained the oriel windows jutting over the side entry, furnished with work-bench and retorts, bottles, and chemical apparatus; and of a large serpent of brass which bore a crystal ball in one claw. At least, he mentally termed it a serpent, which was close enough to the truth.

John Duck said very frankly that he was engaged in research work, a term which covers a multitude of sins; and said nothing further. The gilded deities caused Thornton to class the man as a heathen.

Upon the day following the evening whereupon Thornton wiped the red smear from his hand, Mrs. Thornton departed upon a visit to her cousin, who lived in Brooklyn. Thornton accompanied his wife to the subway, then returned home. On the way he purchased a paper. As he was nearing his house, he encountered John Duck, was greeted with a polite smile and a bow, and passed on.

With the afternoon before him, Bixby Thornton settled down to peruse his newspaper. The first thing that struck his eye was the account of a body found in the street near his own house that same morning. The body was that of a Chinaman, whose throat had been cut.

"My Lord!" exclaimed Thornton. "Then—then that was what—"

A jangle of the door-bell completed his sentence. The thin jangle came from upstairs. Knowing that he was alone in the house, Thornton rose and went to the door. He found a messenger boy, who queried partly whether he were John Duck.

"No," said Thornton. "He's out. You can leave any message with me—"

"Got a bundle." The boy produced a small, soft parcel wrapped in butcher's paper. "Fifty cents collect. Sign here. Ain't it hell how everybody sends things collect so's it 'll get delivered sure? Thanks."

Thornton went indoors with the bundle, laid it aside, and resumed his paper. He wanted to discover more about that dead Chinaman, and he did. He discovered the unpleasant fact that approximately two square feet of skin had been removed from the back of the yellow man, either before or after the latter's throat had been cut. The identity of the victim was unknown.

"This is a devil of a business!" reflected Bixby Thornton. He had dealt much with yellow men in his work with the narcotics squad, even knew a smattering of their tongue. "Yet it hardly seems possible that John Duck could have actually—"

He paused as his eye fell upon the package. What was in that bundle? Could it be possible that John Duck was engaged in some illicit traffic? Narcotics commanded huge prices, of course; any yellow man would be in a position to sell opium or morphine without trouble. The package was tied with string, carelessly.

Thornton took up the package, turned it over. He started; upon the brown paper he beheld the three ideographs: "*Pu-kan-ching*" which means, substantially, "unclean." Temptation seized upon him suspicion goaded him. With sudden determination he broke the string and opened it.

From it he took a small roll of human skin recently fleshed. There could be no mistake.

With shaking fingers, Thornton brought a magnifying-glass to bear, and confirmed his diagnosis. It was human skin with a decidedly yellow hue; it was the piece of skin removed from the back of the murdered Chinaman.

Thornton went to the telephone and called a certain captain of detectives whom he knew very well.

Fifteen minutes later the police officer sat in Thornton's study, inspecting the piece of skin and listening to the story. He did not speak until Thornton had finished; then he imparted some information.

"We know who the murdered man was," he said, revolving a cigar between his lips. "He was identified to-day as Tan Tock, one of the joss-house men down in Chinatown. His scalp showed cicatrices of old burns—"

"Ah!" exclaimed Thornton eagerly. "A Taoist priest?"

"Exactly." From his pocket the officer produced a newspaper clipping. "Here is an advertisement one of the boys turned in—obviously it has some bearing on the case. We traced it. It was handed in by a Chinaman, late last night, for one insertion. We could get no description of the advertiser, except that he wore spectacles."

"Spectacles! Then it was John Duck!"

"Very likely," said the detective dryly.

Thornton spread out the clipping, which was from a "personal" column:

TAN T. may have brazen serpent by calling for same, and paying one hundred dollars. JOHN D.

"They remembered the Chinaman and his spectacles, by his insistence on the spelling of the word 'brazen,'" said the detective. "It's an open and shut case, Thornton! Congratulations, old boy! We'll send this guy up the river in one-two time—"

Thornton looked up, frowning.

"Hold on!" he said reflectively. "Let me tell you something. John Duck has a brass dragon up-stairs, all right. Further, it's a Taoist emblem, for the Taoists go strong on the forces of nature and all that. But there are two points for you to look at very hard: the spelling of that word 'brazen,' and the name Tan Tock."

The detective leaned back, his eyes narrowed upon Thornton.

"Shoot," he said. "You're the doctor in this business. What's the idea?"

Thornton remained silent for a moment, then spoke with slow decision.

"Little things have impressed me with English influences on John Duck, now that I recall them. His walking-suit, his stick, his precise speech which contains many Anglicisms. This word brazen is just such an oddity. That's point one. Now, point two is the name Tan Tock. That's absolutely a Straits Settlement's name, cap'n. The Chinamen there, you know, have been removed from China for generations; they're almost a distinct race, in fact. I'll wager that this whole matter goes back to something in England or Singapore—the cause of the murder will be found—"

The detective laughed heartily.

"My dear Thornton, what the hell do you suppose I care about all this?" he demanded. "It does you credit, old man, but doesn't affect the case. John Duck killed this Tan Tock; we've got that proved beyond a doubt. The cause of the murder will come out later. Even if it doesn't, what matter? We have enough evidence right here," and he tapped the roll of human skin, "to put John Duck in the chair!"

"No, you haven't," said Thornton bluntly. "What time was that advertisement handed in?"

"Somewhere around ten thirty."

"It was nine when I came home and noticed the red drip. D'you suppose he'd have cut a man's throat up-stairs, then have gone down to Park Row and put in a personal ad to the victim? Rats! Besides, who'd have sent this skin to him? If he wanted it, he'd have taken it up-stairs!"

"Confound you!" exclaimed the captain thoughtfully. "I believe there's something in that! Does he know you're in the service?"

Thornton shook his head. At this moment the front door banged. Thornton made a significant gesture, which the other man understood. John Duck had come home.

It is unfortunate for the police that all detectives do not possess the coordinated mental power of their fictional representatives, which bring out all facts in orderly progress. With a start of sudden recollection, the captain abruptly vouchsafed an astonishing fact.

"Look here! I forgot something. That

body was found at six this morning by a milkman. It was examined within twenty minutes. The surgeon said the chap had not yet settled into *rigor mortis*. Therefore, Tan Tock was not killed until some time after midnight, at least."

Thornton stared at him, dismayed. The officer pursued his line of reasoning.

"Granting this time of the murder, your red drip is all nonsense. So is your argument about the newspaper ad. Here's what I think about it! That ad got into the bull-pup editions, and Tan Tock, who was watching for it, came right up here. John Duck killed him and carried the body out into the street. Get me? Now, if we had any means of knowing whether John Duck had a caller last night—"

An exclamation broke from Thornton. "He did! He did! My wife woke me up and said that she heard the elevator creaking—it sticks, you know, and you have to shake the cable just so to make it go on—and I remember hearing the cable shaking—"

The captain of detectives rose.

"Come on, let's go!" he said briskly. "This guy goes to the chair. We'll run up and collar him here and now. Open and shut—open and shut, I tell you!"

Thornton nodded, and picked up the roll of skin.

### III.

JOHN DUCK opened the door to his callers with a bow. He displayed no surprise nor perturbation when Thornton, instead of returning his greeting, threw back his coat to show a badge, and then the police captain followed suit.

"Please come in," he asked, holding the door open.

"You bet," said the captain, swiftly catching his wrist. "I want you for the murder of Tan Tock late last night. What you got to say about it?"

John Duck attempted no resistance. He blinked at his two visitors, and swallowed hard. Then he responded, in a voice that was unsteady:

"You want—me?"

"You," shot out the officer. "We know all about it—about the brass snake, and

about Tan Tock coming here to get it, and you cuttin' his throat. Now—"

"I—I think you have made a mistake," said John Duck gently.

"Don't try to pull that with us—we're hep!" said the officer savagely. "Got anything you want to say before we call the wagon?"

John Duck glanced from one to the other, then nodded.

"I'll tell you the whole thing," he said meekly. "Sit down, gentlemen. I suppose you saw my advertisement, and traced it to me?"

The captain did not answer. He frisked his prisoner, found no weapon, locked the door, and returned. The main thing, as Thornton realized, was to get John Duck's confession at once; so Thornton let the officer manage affairs.

"You're from Singapore?" asserted the captain. "Same as Tan Tock?"

John Duck nodded without surprise. He seemed resigned to telling all he knew.

The three men were sitting in the main room of the apartment the one adorned with brocades and glittering, whiskered gods of gold lacquer. Thornton glanced into the adjoining chamber, which contained the retorts and work-bench and oriel windows; he looked for red stains near the windows, but found none.

John Duck took a cigarette from a box on the table beside him, lighted it, and talked.

"I am from Singapore," he said easily. "I went to college in England, then returned home on a vacation, after three years of education. The temple at which my family worshiped contained that brazen dragon, yonder."

He waved his hand toward the dragon—a tall creature of brass, standing three feet high, holding in one claw a large crystal ball.

"The brass," he pursued, "is Ming work, old and very historic, and valuable. One day it was stolen from the temple and vanished. Together with other men, I searched for it vainly. Then I came to this country and settled here in New York to study. One day, not long ago, I found this historic dragon in a pawn-shop, kept by one

of my own race. By means of exposing its whole history, I obtained it from the shop-keeper, and found that the man who had pawned it, and who expected to redeem it, was a priest in the temple here Tan Tock by name. He was the man who had stolen it in Singapore and had then fled to America.

"Now that I had obtained the dragon I set about letting my friends know of it. They were not satisfied merely to obtain the thing back; they desired punishment. It was intimated to Tan Tock that I had the dragon. He sent word that he wished it back and would buy it, for he had lately won largely in the lottery. So the advertisement was put in the paper."

The captain nodded knowingly. "And he came, and you croaked him, eh?"

John Duck smiled. It was a smile of gentle pity.

"No," he said briefly. "Not at all."

"Well, damn it!" ejaculated the officer. "Then who did?"

"Two men. One of them, Hip Sing, is also a priest in the temple. The other, Lui Yen Yuan, is his friend. They were not of our party at all. They murdered Tan Tock to get his money, which he always carried on his person. That is why I am telling you the whole thing. They had heard of the brazen serpent, and they also wanted to get hold of it for the local temple. They now desire to kill me, in order to get it. This strip of skin was sent me as a threat, you understand?"

The officer swore under his breath. At this point Thornton intervened.

"In view of these facts," he said, accepting John Duck's story as true, "you will aid us in obtaining a conviction of the murderers?"

"Very gladly," said John Duck, with admirable promptitude. "They are no friends of mine. Lui Yen Yuan is an eater of opium, and finds it hard to obtain the drug. If you wish, I will send him a note now offering him some opium and also the brazen serpent at a certain price. He will come to get it. You will arrest him. By offering him opium, he will be unable to refuse—and will confirm all I have said."

"It's against the law to have dope in

your possession," said the captain roughly. "How 'd you get it?"

"I have a permit," and John Duck smiled. "I am a chemist."

There was nothing in his proposal that seemed unlikely. If Lui Yen Yuan were a murderer, and were also an opium fiend, the chances were that in order to get the drug he would confess very fully. Those who smoke opium cannot eat it, and *vice versa*. Pellets are very difficult to obtain. One who has been deprived of them for some time will go through hell to get a supply.

The captain of detectives glanced at Thornton, who nodded imperceptibly.

"All right," said the officer. "Write your note. Thornton, phone for a messenger, will you? I'll watch this guy."

Thornton departed to his telephone down-stairs, for John Duck had none.

Under the watchful eye of the officer, John Duck opened a desk, laid out brushes and ink and paper, and rapidly got off several lines of ideographs. Thornton returned in time to look over the letter, but it was written in Mandarin, of which he knew almost nothing.

"If this story is true," said Thornton, "then—"

"Then we get the guys who croaked Tan Tock," added the officer. "That's what I'm interested in! How soon will the man get here?"

"I think he will come immediately," said John Duck, smiling.

#### IV.

THE message was sent. Thornton took one of John Duck's cigarettes, which were of English make and extraordinarily good; it occurred to him that as yet he had no explanation of the red drip which had first drawn his attention to the entire affair. He said nothing of it at the moment, however. The most important thing now was to substantiate the story told by John Duck.

As the three men waited, the two visitors gradually became impressed with the fact that their host must have told the truth. John Duck had personality. He chatted with them lightly, keenly, giving them both some very interesting information in re-

gard to his race, and subtly impressing upon them his education and standing. He was a research chemist, and the bare fact that he made no pretension to being a Christian convert was enough to vouch strongly for him. Men instinctively respect other men who have the strength of their convictions.

Half an hour passed. The bell jangled.

"If you will allow me," said John Duck, "I will speak to him myself. Otherwise, he might be suspicious."

Since there was nothing else to be done, the captain assented. John Duck went to the old-fashioned speaking-tube that connected with the entrance below, and spoke rapidly in Mandarin. He turned, smiling.

"He is coming right up. May I suggest that he will be armed?"

"You leave him to us!" said the officer eagerly, stationing himself beside the door.

Two minutes later, there was a knock. John Duck opened the door. Into the room stepped a yellow man whom Thornton judged to be of the coolie class, cheaply dressed, his features high-boned and imperturbable, quite ignorant. The captain had him by the wrists as he entered.

"You're under arrest for the murder of Tan Tock! Frisk him, Thornton."

Helpless in that iron grip, the coolie could not resist. His eyes went to the face of John Duck, who smiled and nodded. He said nothing. From his clothes, Thornton took a pistol, also a large and keen knife.

The captain ironed his man and dropped him into a chair.

"Now," he said, standing over him, "d'you want to talk?"

John Duck interposed, apologetically. He came forward with a small box open in his hand, and showed this box to the prisoner. He spoke for a moment rapidly; both the words and the inflection were incomprehensible to Thornton. Lui Yen Yuan nodded.

"He will tell everything, for he is badly in need of the drug," he said. "But he knows no English—"

"Tell him to speak Cantonese, and to speak slowly," said Thornton.

This was done. The prisoner, his eye fastened on the box in the hand of John Duck, obeyed.

"We knew that Tan Tock was coming here," he said. "We followed him and caught him in the street below. It was nearly two in the morning. I held him while Hip Sing cut at his throat, then I cut also. We took his money and left him."

"Straight enough," said Thornton, turning. "Cap'n, go down and use my telephone. Get Hip Sing at once. Bring the wagon here, with an interpreter, and get the story all over again. No dope until the interpreter also gets the story, John Duck! That'll make sure of everything."

Fifteen minutes later the prisoner once again recited his confession. He seemed to have gone utterly and absolutely to pieces. It was a somewhat unusual case, but the opium explained his talking so freely. He even went to the extent of signing a confession in full. Then, and not until then, John Duck gave him the little box of opium pellets.

Before the wagon left a telephone message came saying that Hip Sing had been arrested, and protested his entire innocence. But the story that Hip Sing told made no difference whatever.

When the police had departed Thornton turned to John Duck.

"I regret our suspicions of you," he said. "But there is one thing—" and he went on to tell of the red drip. When he had finished, John Duck beckoned him into the laboratory, smiling.

"I have been engaged on work relating to dyes," he said, and went to the oriel windows. "In order to get rid of unnecessary fluids, which might injure the house piping, I constructed this outlet."

He lifted a small trap in the flooring by the windows, and showed a pipe which led down and out.

"Anything put through this pipe," he explained, "will pass outside to the ground. Last night I had been working on a red dye. What you saw was not blood, but an aniline fluid."

Thornton went down-stairs, wondering at the workings of destiny.

Two weeks later John Duck gave up his lease and disappeared from sight. Within another month Lui Yen and Hip Sing

were found guilty of murder in the first degree, although Hip Sing protested innocence, and were duly executed.

## V.

SOME months passed. Bixby Thornton had completely forgotten the peculiar case of the brazen serpent in the rush of work thrown on the service by the prohibition laws and the income tax.

One night Thornton came home, dead tired. His wife, with the agreeable intimation that she had corned beef and cabbage for supper, handed him a letter bearing a Chinese postmark. In some surprise Thornton examined this letter, and perceived that it had been posted from Peking. He got into his slippers and settled down by the fire while Mrs. Thornton set about getting supper on the table.

Thornton drew from the envelope a typewritten sheet. The letter was not long, but it contained a gently ironic gist of information:

MY DEAR MR. THORNTON:

Perhaps you remember the brazen serpent affair? I cannot let this go longer without giving an explanation which is due you, my dear friend.

The story which I told you and the police officer was incorrect. I myself was the person who stole the brass dragon from the temple in

Singapore. Facts will suffice; reasons are immaterial here.

I hid myself in New York. At length, Tan Tock ran me down; but by that time I was prepared for him. Thinking me repentant, he called on me to receive the dragon; instead, I killed him and left him in the street outside. Hip Sing, his fellow priest, sent me a strip of his skin, as you know, in mute threatening. Hip Sing, I presume, had been watching the house and found the body. The way out was very simple. I hired Lui Yen Yuan to die for me, which he was glad to do in order to relieve his honored parents from all future poverty. He implicated Hip Sing. The police attended to all other details, and left me at liberty to pursue my research work. I thank you, and beg to remain,

Your humble and grateful servant,

JOHN DUCK.

Bixby Thornton pressed the letter into a crumpled ball, and quietly laid it on the coals before him. A moment later his wife bustled into the room with a passing query:

"And who was your Chinese letter from, my dear?"

Thornton started slightly. "That? Oh, that was just a note of thanks," he said reflectively, "from a young Chink I helped out of trouble some little while back."

Mrs. Thornton noticed, however, that her husband did not relish his corned beef and cabbage nearly as much as usual that evening.

## SHE KEPT IT DARK

BY PAULA REVERE

SHE kept it dark, though Father Time  
Conspired to perpetrate the crime  
Of turning raven locks to snow  
When raven locks were needed so:  
A business maid must look her prime.

Alas! for tragic pantomime  
When frost doth raven tresses rime!  
'It shall not turn,' said Mae, and so  
She kept it dark.

With art and skill and many a dime,  
Black locks remained, though years did climb;  
But, that the world should never know  
Her camouflage, nor guess her wo,  
*She kept it dark!*

# The Progress of J. Bunyan by Stephen Chalmers

Author of "The Bronze Helmet," etc.

## CHAPTER X.

### I DRAW MY SWORD!

I HAD now a better opportunity to study Mistress Eveleigh's uncle as he sat in the summer-house awaiting his fair niece.

It was natural that I should at once remark some familiar resemblance between him and Mistress Joyce, such as that proud poise of the head. I even fancied a common likeness in his features and the coloring of his eyes. But I placed family resemblance more in his manner and refined speech than anything wholly physical.

As I sat in the tree watching him I realized that if Richard Eveleigh were only shaven and freshly attired he would present quite a handsome figure of a man. But no doubt in a household composed of two women and one old serving-man, he was unable to repair his attire to its customary nicety.

Unfortunate cavalier as I judged him to be, he was yet lucky above all men to be housed under the same roof with Mistress Joyce, to breathe the same air, to converse with her, and, above all, to be able to command her presence as he wished it.

His good fortune was further manifest when presently I saw my lady come from the manor and approach the bower.

In the June sunlight which fell about her graceful figure and played in her golden hair I thought her even more beautiful

than she had seemed to me in her two previous appearances to my eyes. She came toward the summer-house slowly, her fingers twined before her, her head slightly bowed, and her eyes drooped to the ground. She was modest grace moving in that old-world garden.

As she appeared before the bower she curtsied to her uncle. He at once sprang to his feet and, bowing gallantly, kissed the fingers which he disengaged from their twining. She did not smile, but received the tribute without either indifference or pleasure.

"You did summon me?" she said, without lifting her eyes.

"Pray be seated," said her uncle. It seemed to be his favorite invitation on all occasions. Joyce sank upon the rustic bench. Her Uncle Richard, sitting down beside her, drew one of her hands into his own lap, and began to talk with her in a quiet but eager voice.

I could not hear what was said, nor what Mistress Joyce replied, if, indeed, she said anything at all. But his manner was engaging, flattering, persuasive. I thought to myself that, had not Joyce been his niece, his personal charm would have been dangerous to feminine susceptibility.

Joyce, however, may have been used to her uncle's ways, for she held herself toward him with an air of patient humoring, submission, and perhaps a little tolerance. Of one thing I was sure. She was un-

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 10.

happy, uneasy, in some fear of something, either her uncle himself, or matter touching him.

Presently the little scene in the bower fascinated me and at the same time filled me with a sense of—it could hardly be jealousy. Yei there was an empty gnawing, as of hunger at the stomach, but the vacant ache was at my heart.

For Richard Eveleigh was a very gallant uncle. If I had not previously heard him tell John Bunyan that he *was* her uncle, I should have said to myself that he was making love to the lady. Repeatedly he kissed her hand. As his gallantry became more pronounced he sat ever nearer, and then—

He placed an affectionate arm about her and imprinted a salute upon her fair cheek. As she did not protest or resist, sitting still with (I fancied) a growing pallor on her face, he was emboldened to attempt her lips.

Then she stirred. With a gesture of real or pretended coquetry she shielded her sweet mouth with her disengaged hand and rose to her feet.

She spoke in a low, rapid tone, but still I could not distinguish more than a word or two. Clearly, however, she was begging him to do that which he was not of a mind to do. Then, in her anxiety or despair, she raised her voice so that I heard clearly.

"No, no, I beseech you! It is not seemly at this time, although you honor me beyond expectation or deserving. I do beg that you will retire to the hall. But this hour you have narrowly escaped betrayal. Who knows that others do not spy upon the gardens at this moment? Within the week there was one whose intent I have yet wholly to learn."

Even as she said this her eyes glanced at the tree in which I was hid. My heart gave a great leap, but the rest of me remained as still as a piece of dead wood. For the moment I thought she had caught a glimpse of me as she had of Jonas Sly-the that day; but then my better sense told me her glance was merely an involuntary reaction of memory's association.

"Then even as you command, sweet niece," said her gallant uncle with a laugh.

"In bower or in hall, by hill or dell—as you will. Where thou art, I am content to be. To the house, then, if by obedience I am not denied the heaven of thy presence."

"But nay!" she protested. "Go alone, I prithee. I would fain rest a while here in the bower. I would take counsel with myself on what thou hast said—and other things that trouble me."

"Trouble thee, sweet!" he cried in mock horror.

"Nay, there my tongue slipped. Therefore ha' mercy on my confusion. I am but a poor maid. Leave me awhile if you do regard me as you say. Anon I shall return to the hall."

"Then thy slave obeys," said he, again bending and caressing her fingers with his lips. "Bide here if it is thy sweet pleasure, and ponder thy maiden perplexities. But leave me not too long out of the sunshine and—think well and in my favor, sweet Joyce."

With mixed feelings I watched his graceful and somewhat jaunty passage back to the manor-house, within which he disappeared. Turning from contemplation of this amazing uncle, I looked down upon my lady in the bower.

She sat very upright on the rustic bench, her eyes gazing blankly before her, her face pale and somehow stony in its setness, her hands lying limply in her lap. For a full minute she sat thus, a figure of cold despair, it seemed to me.

Then her stoniness melted. Her lips quivered, her face began to work as if she battled with some inward tempest of emotion, and all at once Mistress Joyce Eveleigh laid her shapely, smooth arms upon the weather-worn table, slowly lowered her queenly head upon them, and presently I needed no visible evidence that she was sobbing her heart out in that bower.

In that moment my old failing seized possession of me—a blind anger, a blind desire of violence against whatever or whoever caused my lady's grief. I acted upon the accompanying impulse before I could take counsel with judgment.

Down from that tree I dropped to the ground on the garden side of the wall. A dozen swift strides brought me to the bow-

er. On the way I unsheathed my sword, although why I should have done so I do not know, save that I was young and of heroic temperament in those days..

With the naked blade in my right hand I stood at the entrance to the little rustic house and spoke before she was aware of my presence.

"Mistress Eveleigh," I said, "I see you ill beset with trouble and grief. In what way can an honest gentleman serve? My will and my sword are yours to command."

She looked up and gave a little cry of fright at my appearing, although not so much, I now know, at the unexpectedness of it. She glanced quickly at the manor, and then, to my surprise, laid a hand upon my left arm and drew me into the shadows of the bower.

"Master Brooke!" she cried at the pitch of a whisper.

"Aye, Mistress Joyce. And to ha' done with child's play, I am no tinker's apprentice, as I think you know, but son of a gentleman, and not myself wholly without right to champion any lady. I will confess that I did overhear much from my hiding in that tree there; but think me not a spy or an enemy. I did so act only that I might learn how to serve."

For a moment she gazed into my face with gentle, grateful eyes. The fingers upon my arm seemed to tighten and cling for a moment. Then the great fear took possession again, and she cried in the same tense whisper:

"Go! Oh, I prithee, go! If you love me, sir—that is, if you have regard for my peace—would truly serve me—go this instant. Leave this garden and do not return!"

"Nay! Not until—"

"As a gentleman you will—you must!" she pleaded. "I knew without words you were that. Now a lady asks a gentleman to retire. Surely you will not ask me to explain?"

As she said it the fingers on my arm crept to my left hand and lingered there, as delicate as an angel's touch in sleep.

"I must even then obey," I said; "yet 'tis hard to leave thee with tears still undried on thy cheeks, knowing not the rea-

son. If I go, sweet Mistress Joyce, wilt promise me this: wilt summon me if need arise?"

"That I promise," she replied quickly, "should need of any champion arise. And you will promise me one thing, too?"

"Anything!" I whispered joyously out of the sheer intoxication of her nearness.

"That you will tell no man of what you may have heard or seen in this garden? That you will tell no man that you were here, or even know of such a place?"

Instantly I thought of John Bunyan. He had been here. He knew of much that had transpired. But I need tell him nothing further than he already knew.

"Promise, Master Brooke!"

"I promise," I whispered, drunk with the sweet wine of her voice, her gaze, the thrill of her fingers on my hand.

"Go, then," she said. "Go as you came, unseen of any eyes. Indeed, I shall ever hold thee in even more grateful remembrance."

I went by the wall, upon the parapet of which I looked back for one more sight of her dear eyes. But she had disappeared, either within the bower or toward the manor.

Presently I was walking as in a pleasant dream toward Naseby. At first my thoughts were all of her—her eyes, her voice; the touch of her fingers still sensed upon my hand.

Then the intoxication of June fancy turned to the inevitable reverse of the matter—principally that uncle of hers who, I began to suspect, was no uncle at all, but a clandestine lover! And that lover had kissed her cheek, would have kissed her lips but for her—what was it? Coquetry, or fear of observing eyes, or simply that she did not love the man?

I thought of him, wondered about him. I would be glad to hear John's opinion of the man. But this I might not ask without endangering my promise. The less I discussed the matter with Bunyan the less difficult it would be to avoid John's natural questioning about what happened after his departure.

Bunyan, too, was held by something of a promise to Ruth. Perhaps he, too, would

care little to discuss our adventure in view of that nice question of his duty regarding the cavalier who was harboring at Eveleigh Manor.

Clearly the fears of our two angels were for Richard Eveleigh, their promise-taking all for his protection. But if, as I suspected, he was no uncle of Joyce's, then his name was not—

I stopped on the road and clapped a hand to my brow, behind which something brightened like a flash of intelligence's lightning.

"Dolt!" I cried, smiting my head. "Twas the king!"

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE DILEMMA.

**A**FTER my first amazement, which was as much at my slowness of perception as realization of the fact itself, I was seized with a sense of the ridiculous side of the matter.

Just why I began to laugh almost hysterically I scarce know; but it is true that all at once I was sitting by the roadside with my hands clapped to my ribs, and I was laughing as if the point of some huge jest had just dawned upon my newly awakened intelligence.

The realization that Richard Eveleigh was the king, upon whose familiar image ready imagination had built a resemblance to his niece, did not strike me so forcibly in that moment as the fact that it was Charles, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland, and defender of the faith, with whom Hobgoblin Jack Bunyan had argued pomps, vanities, divine rights, people's rights, and the liturgy!

Again I saw my tinker-trooper thundering at his majesty, who sat on the edge of that rustic table, laughing as with wit and quip he parried John's wordy attacks. No wonder the king enjoyed himself.

And the cream of the jest was that Jack Bunyan had not the faintest idea of the identity of the personage he engaged in argument. He had called the king "Master Weakspine," and taunted him as a physical coward. What would John have

said—done—had he known it was the king? What would he do now if—?

Then my laughter ceased abruptly, and I felt alarmed, ashamed, at my own levity. For instantly a serious dilemma confronted me.

What *would* John Bunyan do if, since leaving the garden the revelation of that man's identity had dawned on him as it had on me? Knowing how he was swayed in all things by his tyrant conscience, by his own arbitrary ruling between right and wrong, I feared his promise to Ruth, made under a misconception—a deception, he would call it—would not be regarded by him as binding for a moment. He would do his duty, and report to our general the presence of the king at Eveleigh Manor, not a mile from Cromwell's headquarters!

Then the king would be seized, and his seizure at Eveleigh Manor would seriously involve Mistress Joyce.

But Bunyan might not be aware that it was the king he had encountered; might never imagine it—*unless I told him*.

The gravity of my situation struck me now with such significance that I fairly gasped.

If Bunyan did not know it was the king, then the former's problem was a simple one—probably already solved in his mind. He would not betray the man he supposed to be Mistress Eveleigh's uncle, merely because that person was of royalist sympathies. Eveleigh bore no arms, save that weapon he had drawn "to save his own skin." And, after all, John had been an intruder in that garden.

Without unduly straining his honor as a soldier of Parliament, Bunyan could—and probably would—keep his mouth shut, especially as to do otherwise would involve Ruth, certainly distress her.

But all this only added to the difficulties of my own position. Ought I to tell Bunyan that his promise had been made under a false conception, and, by so informing him, let loose the action which that troublesome conscience of his would demand?

My own promise to Joyce—to tell no man what I had heard and seen in that garden—was also given under a false conception of that "uncle's" identity. My

own direct duty, as it appeared to me—unless there was some other way of saving honor—was to inform not only Bunyan of his error, but our general of the great fact which I had stumbled upon:

Suppose I did? And I did suppose it in order to clear the situation in my addled mind. What then?

Cromwell would at once rush a company of troopers to Eveleigh Manor, surround the house, and seize the king. And he would probably arrest every other person in the house—Mistress Joyce, Ruth Prynne, and old Henry Falconer. No doubt others (as yet unknown to me) who were in sympathy with the house, if not in actual knowledge of its secret, would also suffer.

Jonas Slythey would see to that; for now I thought I saw reason for his spying upon the manor, although not clearly his motive for attempting to have Joyce destroyed as a "witch."

Slythey having no love for either Bunyan or me, and being an adept liar, might even twist facts and motives to involve Hobgoblin and myself, although any such charges must fall flat were I the informer whose word brought about the capture of the king.

I the informer whose word brought about the arrest, trial, and probable death of England's king! My blood turned cold at the thought. For the first time I understood that weak hesitancy of Manchester and Essex in the matter of doing violence to the king himself. Something in my blood, the old innate respect for the king's person, made me shrink from the thought of being such an instrument, right and righteous as the people's cause might be.

Such an exploit as opened before me, beckoned me, commanded me by my sworn oath as a soldier of Parliament, would bring me much fame of a sort, undoubtedly promotion, preferment, the restoration of my late father's estate in Somerset, which shire must inevitably fall to Lord Fairfax presently.

But against all this—and my honor as a soldier—the eyes of Mistress Joyce looked at me through a cloud of anger and reproach. To be the agency of bringing such

sorrow and probable humiliation upon Joyce, who, I now saw, was sacrificing herself to her loyalty—that hurt!

I groaned as I sat there by the roadside with my head in my hands and my eyes fixed blankly on (I think) the toes of my jackboots.

Now I understand all things, except the attitude of Jonas Slythey in the duck-pond incident. The rest was clear, and the sequence of happenings at the manor became established in my mind.

Charles, after Naseby, had played the game of the fox, doubling back on his pursuers and taking to earth where least and last he might be looked for—not a mile from Cromwell's camp.

I could establish almost to within a few hours when he arrived at the manor. He could not have been there that day when Mistress Joyce and Ruth Prynne talked at the kitchen door with Tinker Bunyan and his apprentice. But between that time and the following morning, when Ruth shut the door in our faces, something had developed in that house which made the presence of Roundheads particularly unwelcome.

Then Ruth's letter to Jack Bunyan. Ah! She had spoken the truth when she said that a great misery was like to fall upon the manor, and further ill upon her mistress. No doubt Ruth had been indiscreet, but her indiscretion in that letter was born of love for her mistress, fear for her welfare, and the desire for a strong man's advice. Being a woman, she had perhaps forgotten Bunyan's honor as a soldier in thinking of him as a man who would not fail her in any emergency.

What she had thought to profit by Jack's advice I do not know. She could hardly have proposed to reveal the somewhat unwelcome guest's identity to Bunyan. And yet she may have. Who knows the workings of a woman's reasoning? Perhaps she believed it quite possible to reveal the king's presence to Hobgoblin Jack and have that Roundhead trooper aid her in some way without doing his soldierly duty.

But she did not foresee what did happen—that which promptly made her perceive the fallacy of any such hope of solution—when she discovered the king and John

Bunyan arguing vociferously in the summer-house.

No doubt, comprehending none of the argument or its nature, she believed the king was even then betrayed by her indiscretion. No wonder she tried to throw sand in John's eyes when she discovered he did not know the king. No wonder she thought better about being frank with John Bunyan and asking his assistance.

The scene in the bower, too, between Joyce and the king. Ah, that was now damnably clear. Charles, the gay irresponsible, peril in abeyance for the moment, was again himself. Smitten by the charms of his young hostess, he would add her to the rather lengthy list of his favored fair.

Poor Joyce! She was hemmed in by troubles.

First, there was Jonas Slythey. No matter in what other way she might be involved with that turncoat, there was the danger of the man's discovering (if he was not already aware of) the king's presence at Eveleigh Manor. If he already knew, to what end was the spy withholding his knowledge from Cromwell? Was he hoping to use his information as a weapon against Joyce, a weapon of coercion to something he required of her, the same thing to which he had possibly tried to coerce her by the fear of death for witchcraft?

Then there was the king. Now, I understood the forced smile and patient tolerance with which she received his gallantries in the bower. How could she have acted otherwise? He was the king, she his subject and hostess, and but a poor maid thrown upon her own resources in the situation. The wonder is that she held him off so ably.

In truth she had need of a good knight, as I had offered to be. But now I knew that in taking my promise to secrecy—a promise which involved me in a nice dilemma—she had given me one in return which she need never fulfil if she did not choose to. And she would never choose to summon her knight against her king!

So long as I did nothing on my side, the king might remain at Eveleigh Manor in

perfect safety and security, granting that Bunyan or Slythey did not spill the fat in the fire. Rather than that should happen, or that, on the other hand, the king should remain at the manor to annoy my sweet mistress with his unwelcome gallantries, I would—

Well? What would I do? What could I do? What *was* I to do?

It was my honor as a soldier against my promised word as a gentleman. Clearly I might take my own release from that promise given under a false conception of the facts, and have the king taken bodily from that house. But—I shrank from the consequences to her, and between me and her.

If I could only ask advice of John Bunyan. But that would involve him in my own dilemma if, as I suspected, he was as yet quite unknowing that it was the king with whom he had argued.

No! I must solve the problem alone, and acquit myself on both horns of the dilemma; for, mark you, I did not propose to have my honor foresworn for love of any woman—even Mistress Joyce! The fact that many men have done it—and bitterly regretted it—was not in my mind just then, either.

I applied my wits to finding a way out of the situation confronting me.

From the generally disheveled appearance of the king I surmised he was at present without attendants, armed or unarmed. To have attendants in the fox-game he was playing would be out of the question. Therefore, he must be alone in that house with two women and that seventy-year-old man servant.

The thought that the king was depending for safety on secrecy as to his whereabouts, a secrecy which would not have been possible with a strong body-guard, presently suggested an idea—a daring idea—a plan which, if executed, would solve my double problem.

*Why not capture the king single-handed?*

If I, without any confidant or assistant, could remove the king from that house, it should be no great strain upon conscience to place his capture elsewhere, and thus relieve Mistress Joyce from the charge of

harboring him. And surely my royal captive, if he were indeed the first gentleman in the land, would support my deception rather than betray her who was like to suffer in his cause.

But still I shrank from the very thought of laying violent hands upon the king. I might be the lion of the hour; yet that hour would pass, and the person who had delivered the king to his enemies be held up to obloquy. In that moment I felt sure (and time has proven I was right) that men's political opinions would suffer reaction.

But stronger than this reasoning of self-interest was my instinctive aversion to the task itself and the bringing of sorrow upon Mistress Joyce Eveleigh.

But in this plan, whether it succeeded or failed, lay the least of many evils. Joyce, naturally, would grieve for the king's capture, feel it the more poignantly, perhaps, because it was her proffered knight who effected it. But she would at least be relieved of an unwelcome suitor, and out of her deep womanhood she must appreciate my position sooner or later.

Was it not possible, too, that her loyalty was less to the king personally than to that cause for which her father fell at Marston Moor? And then—the king might escape me! He had the wit, and he might even have the strength behind him, to defeat my rash scheme. I might be killed in my foolhardy enterprise!

But better disaster than the secret consciousness of having failed in honor as a sworn soldier of Parliament. Better defeat, or even to lie dead at Joyce's feet, so long as she knew my motive and that I was not only a gentleman but a *man*!

My mind more than half made up, I rose from the ditchside and walked slowly toward the camp, further pondering the matter as I went.

Again I wished I could talk freely with Jack Bunyan and derive benefit from his curious intuition, his perception of the fine line between actions right and wrong. For, mark you, while he pretended to be an inveterate wrong-doer himself, he was a natural-born arbiter of conduct in others. He heartily disliked, for instance, hearing

others use profanity, as if he would willingly shoulder all men's burden of sinfulness on that score!

But I could not reveal to Bunyan the essential fact in my dilemma—that Richard Eveleigh was no other than the king himself. I had promised Joyce I should "tell no man;" but if I carried out my half-formed scheme I should at once be relieved from the necessity of violating that promise—mistaken though it was.

I shall be brief about my meeting with Bunyan in the camp. I discovered him immersed in the study of his new book, "The Practise of Piety," and was relieved presently to find him less ready to discuss what had actually happened in the garden than to rail at the theories of that Master Weakspine!

He was apparently unsuspecting that Master Weakspine was other than Joyce's uncle, Richard Eveleigh, and I could see he wholly believed that Ruth had summoned him only that she might give him that little book and bid him a temporary farewell. So far he could have given no reflection to the significant wording of that summoning letter!

But lest there be even a spark of suspicion in his mind as to Master Weakspine's identity, a spark which might presently burst into a flame of certain knowledge, I tried him with a question which I endeavored to make casual in tone.

"Jack," said I, "what would you do if you met the king face to face?"

My heart beat almost painfully while John read a few more lines in his book on piety before answering. From his tone and manner I knew at once that the manor's secret was safe, at least from him.

"I say with Noll," said Hobgoblin ponderously, "being, like him, a servant of those in rightful authority, that I would shoot him down with my pistol, even as I would any other proper enemy of righteous liberty!"

Of course, Bunyan meant he would shoot the king if he met him on the field of battle and could not capture him. I was not so sure what his answer might have been had I put the question the way the facts warranted, and as it was in my mind.

But I could see it would be unsafe to leave such a question to Bunyan's decision; and presently, being satisfied that the issue was all between *my* honor and *my* duty, *my* heart and *my* conscience, I elected for compromise.

That night I would try to execute my plan—to capture the king—alone!

## CHAPTER XII.

### WHO FIRED?

**I**T was easy enough to leave camp when I was ready to start upon my adventure.

Any difficulty might occur in the re-entering, for I could not afford to risk refusal of leave by requesting it; and without a passport I might not have the password.

But if I returned with the king as a captive I could dispense with passwords and the like. On the other hand, if I did not have his majesty as an explanation of my temporary desertion—well, probably I would not be alive to offer any explanation.

Before starting out I wrote a letter to John Bunyan, telling him that I was gone upon some private business, the nature of which I had not been free to confide to him, but that if I failed to have made return to camp by muster-bugle in the morning, he must know that I had met with mishap and that I went to the manor to capture Richard Eveleigh, who was no other than the king.

Then, having finished the letter to my satisfaction, I fell to being doubtful of the propriety of even posthumous revelation. If I had not returned by muster-bugle it would mean that I was dead, or at least had failed in my enterprise. My thought in writing this letter was that John should be apprised of what had probably happened to me. But now I saw that Bunyan, while no doubt he would regret me, would take my message as a call to duty, and that he, in turn, would attempt to seize the king, though probably in some more regular manner.

Clearly this letter of mine was a violation of the spirit of my promise to tell no man. Whether I was alive or dead, it would bring trouble upon Mistress Joyce.

Having decided to be in for a pound while in for a penny—I destroyed the letter which had cost me an hour's thinking!

So, without seeing Jack, or leaving a single explanatory word, I stole out of camp after dusk, like the deserter I was presently to be rated.

In less than half an hour, when it had become quite dark, I climbed over the garden wall of the manor and paused a few minutes in the summer-house while I reconnoitered and reviewed my plan.

The manor that evening presented the appearance of a country residence which knew none of war's alarms. It stood blackly against the western sky, where the last glow of after sundown was all but melted into the starry purple of night. A light burned in an upper-story window—Joyce's chamber, I fancied—and several lights shone from the ground windows facing the gardens. The house had no air of secrecy, but rather of a domestic hearth happier for the world shut out.

The feeling of this impression rendered my task of intrusion only the more difficult; but my mind was already made up, and I delayed but a short time to go over the details of my scheme once more.

Presently I drew my pistol, the only weapon I carried besides my sword, and advanced toward the house. Up the low, broad stairs I marched to the front door, discovered an iron knocker, and rattled a peremptory summons.

After a long delay, and just as I was about to apply the iron knocker again, there came a rush of hurrying feet to the hall. I suspected that this rush to the door had been preceded by some sort of conference within. I was sure of this when the door opened by Henry Falconer, the old man said with clear pretense of surprise, while yet his voice shook:

"I—I thought I heard a knock, sir. May I make so bold as to inquire your business? The—the hour is—my lady is—"

He stopped short at sight of the cocked pistol in my right hand. I do believe he would have blocked my way had I not raised the weapon slightly and said:

"Very sorry, Falconer, but you must

stand aside. I am here to serve your mistress, if you and she but knew it."

I think he more than half believed that, for he made no further move to obstruct my entrance, although his knees shook and his face was the color of a dead man's. I was in the hall, and he had closed the door behind me before he spoke again:

"Yes, sir. I am sure of that, sir. But—but what message do you bring to her? I can take it to her at once."

"None, Falconer," said I, while my eyes settled on a closed door from the keyhole of which a ray of bright light streamed into the hall. "And I must tell you, old man, that you would do well not to alarm her by word of my presence even. My business is with the king."

"The king!" he gasped. "But, sir—what do you say? The king? There is no king here!"

"Well, Master Richard Eveleigh," I said, moving toward that door with the bright-lighted keyhole. "Mistress Joyce's uncle, if you will."

My hand closed on the door-knob. Instantly old Falconer was at my side.

"Sir—in the name of God—do not enter there! Sir—"

Then I knew I was at the right door. I was sorry for the old serving-man, but it was no time for minor sentiment. I turned the pistol toward him again and said:

"I understand and respect your loyalty, Falconer, but you can do no more than you have done. You are an old man and I young. You will not force me to measures that go against the grain? You will best serve your mistress by keeping still."

With that, leaving the old man to do as he saw fit, I turned the door-handle and stepped inside, the pistol leveled before me.

It saw the picture within at a glance, even before the man by the fireplace stirred and rose to his feet.

It was a large, high-ceiled room, with a big, open hearth on which a log-fire burned. I do not know how it was furnished, but I got an impression of good taste and rich simplicity. To my left a couple of windows looked out (I suppose) on the gardens before the manor. In the wall to my right was a second door leading to some

other part of the house. The fireplace was directly before me, and behind me was the door by which I had entered.

But it was the only occupant of the chamber who claimed my direct attention. At my entrance he was seated in a deep, comfortable chair, his outstretched legs crossed before the blaze, his head thrown back, and his hands clasped behind it. The whole attitude of the man in that moment was of one whose state of physical comfort is conducive to reverie.

For a few moments he did not stir, no doubt thinking I was Falconer. But as I did not move again, or speak, he turned his head sharply and saw a roundhead in the room, and with a pistol leveled at his head. At that he sprang to his feet and faced me—bravely, I must say, and with a flash of fire in his eye; and there was that ghost of a humorous smile about his mouth.

"Aha!" he exclaimed. "An unexpected pleasure, to be sure. Be seated!"

I could have laughed at that familiar invitation, but to laugh would have robbed me of half my advantage.

"Charles Stuart," I said, trying hard to remember that a king was just a man after all; "I am here less to apprehend you than to spare the lady of this house a worse embarrassment. I will ask you to walk out of that door—before me!"

The king elevated his eyebrows in an interrogating way, and cocked his head slightly to one side, as if he considered some interesting conundrum put to him.

"Less to apprehend me than to spare a lady—I do not understand," he said.

"And I ha' no time to explain." And I repeated: "You will walk out—before me, sir!"

Perhaps he fancied some advantage in the suggested move toward the door, for he went in that direction without protest. I edged around in a half circle, still keeping him covered with the pistol, until our positions were reversed—I by the fireplace, the king by the door. There he turned and said:

"Before we proceed further, young sir—your face is familiar!"

I knew it was only a speech to gain time, but I was beginning to have less apprehen-

sion on the score of failure, and rather fancied lingering a little over the most important situation in which I was ever likely to be a principal figure.

The execution of the rest of the enterprise seemed easy. All I had to do was give the word, backing it with my pistol point, and Charles would have to walk out of that door, out of that house, and toward the Parliamentary camp less than a mile away. I expected no serious interference from Falconer or Mistress Joyce, although it was here I dreaded the more.

"Familiar?" said I. "That is but fancy, sir, unless you see in me a strong likeness to my father, who was Hallam Brooke, of Brooke Manor, in Somerset."

The king looked puzzled—genuinely puzzled, while he seemed altogether unconscious of my pistol. All at once he visibly started.

"Brooke—of Somerset!" he cried. "Ah, yes—I remember!" He fell into a moment's musing. Then his eyes lifted to my face and he said: "You are, indeed, like him—Brooke—of Somerset. They tell me he fell at Marston Moor, fighting against his king. See the pity of it, Brooke—*young Brooke—of Somerset*. I would ha' had a word with him ere that day. Then, at least, he might ha' fallen on his king's side, as befitted a Brooke of Somerset, and his son be wearing no Roundhead's russet coat. I loved your father."

"You flatter his memory—or me?" I asked.

"Nay!" said the king with a touch of hauteur. "I am not come to that yet. I speak truth, not to gain mercy of any lad's favor, but because you are your father's son. Your father was close to me—very close. Later—too late, alas—I knew the truth of his defection. He was a man maligned in my too trusting ears. But that he was already in arms with Manchester and Essex I would ha' recalled him to my side, honoring him in my personal service."

"Even now—" His eyes rested on my face with a kind of sad thoughtfulness—"even now I would welcome the son of Brooke of Somerset, were that son's hand held out to me with no weapon in it. To what purpose, my boy?"

For a moment I felt that purpose weaken. But then I recalled what a splendid actor this king was; how he could win softness from iron, a saint from religion, compliance from the most obdurate. And as he had roused the memory of my father, my father's son was not now to be blinded by promised favor or seduced by flattery.

"My purpose," I said evenly, "is to arrest Charles Stuart in the name of the people's Parliament; and again I order you to walk out before me!"

"You command. The king obeys," said he, with a mock bow.

Calmly, then, he turned and would have opened the door which I had closed behind me when I entered, using it as a shield to my back against surprise from the hall. But the door was suddenly opened from without, and Mistress Joyce swiftly appeared between the king and my pistol point.

On the instant, so great was my surprise and so impregnable the sweet rampart between bullet and target, the king could easily have slipped out of the room, closed the door after him, and made his escape from the house. But he was altogether too gallant a gentleman for that, while a lady covered his retreat.

Over Joyce's shoulder he laughed at me, but stood where he was. Beyond him, through the open door, I saw Falconer and Ruth Prynne in the hall. The old man's face was white and quivering, but Ruth's was peculiarly alert, and her eyes were fixed on me with a look of—was it warning?

But Mistress Joyce claimed most of my attention for a few minutes. She blazed at me with contempt and indignation.

"So!" she cried. "This is the way a gentleman honors his own word?"

"I have not broken it," I said, "though I had been justified in so doing, had I not bethought me of another way to acquit honor and yet spare thee difficulty. I have spoken with no man of the knowledge gained in the garden, even as I promised. I am alone—"

Oh, fool! I saw a smile of hope and triumph on the king's face. I almost heard the sigh of relief that came from old Falconer. But the faces of the two women

were something puzzling as a study in contrast. At that slip of my tongue I thought Mistress Joyce's suddenly softened to an almost maternal sympathy for my youthful maladroitness. But Ruth's brows were drawn in a tense frown and still her eyes stared at me, full of some not quite explicable warning.

For a few moment we were at a deadlock. Rather, the tables were completely turned against me. I was helpless to act, for Joyce still interposed her body between my pistol-point and the king's breast, while Charles himself marked time with some flippant remarks over her shoulder. It was really too bad, he said, that a plan so well thought out should go wrong through a gentlemanly youth's sense of chivalry.

That his own chivalry was not lacking in that moment was made clear when he suddenly placed an arm about Joyce's waist, swung her gently but firmly to one side, and confronted me and my pistol without advantage, save to me.

"Enough of this!" he cried. "See, young sir. My heart is now in even line with your weapon. Perhaps this, like all things, is fitly ordered. And Cavalier Stuart is quite ready to be shot by Roundhead Brooke, if indeed the son of an English gentleman thinks it is God's justice to shoot his king!"

Again I felt my moral courage ooze, melted by his personality, his smiling bravery. Or was it that he knew I would not shoot? Aye, that was it! He had penetrated my weakness.

The knowledge angered me. I knew that if I did not pull myself together and assume an attitude which was not in my heart, not only was my game lost, but I must be left in a painfully humiliating situation before Joyce and in my own esteem.

"For the last time," I said, "and I know you will not again shelter behind a fair lady—I bid you march out of this house. And I swear that if you do not obey before I ha' counted three—I will shoot!"

"He says he will shoot," said the king, turning humorously to Joyce.

"One!" I cried, my blood aboil at that aside, as if he translated a child's gibbering boast.

It must have been dramatic to all con-

cerned while I counted, although to the king the situation seemed to appeal only as mildly amusing. To me, the moments were horrible. I found myself purposely drawing out the spaces and there must have been a significant long pause while I tried to read the meaning of the signals that Ruth was now making with her hand. What was she trying to convey?

"Two!"

Still the king did not move; and neither did Joyce. Perhaps she, too, understood that long pause as a sign that I was weakening, that I would not shoot, even if I did bring myself to the word—three!

But—she was wrong. I would prove to her that I was no moral weakling to be abashed by circumstances. As I wetted my dry lips and shaped my tongue to the word, my heart was like cold lead. I must either surrender myself, or retire ignominiously beaten, or—shoot the King of England.

"Three!" I barely whispered.

My finger crooked on the trigger just as a slight sound came from behind me, and I heard a little gasp from Ruth Prynne. Before I could spin around, sensing danger behind me, I saw Joyce's right arm fly up to the level of her heart and heard a pistol explode.

Whether that pistol went off in my own hand, or hers, I had no time to decide in my mind! for with the roar of the exploding weapon I saw the whole room fill with a red flame, which died out, leaving the chamber—the whole world—and me—in darkness—silence.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### I TURN CAVALIER.

WHEN I ascended from a region which may have been Hobgoblin's "Flaming Abyss," I was conscious of some one applying something cooling to a burning sear along the right side of my head.

I opened my eyes and discovered a heavy fog upon the world. In this haze there appeared a face—a face all softness, and wet with tears of concern. I closed my eyes again, deciding that I would wait until the

fog lifted before setting forth to camp. Not hearing Jack Bunyan's roaring voice, I wondered if the mob had overcome him and thrown him into the duck-pond. The face I had seen in the haze must be that of the lady on whose behalf I had just been fighting by the old well.

It was some time before I placed past events in their proper order, and remembered my encounter with the king. Through the fog I heard voices, muffled and distant. One was the voice of the king, speaking in low, rapid tones; another was also fairly familiar, but I could not recall where I had heard it before.

I was still very much confused in mind. Dimly I recalled some warning of danger behind me, Mistress Joyce's arm lifting suddenly, and the report of a discharging pistol. Ah, yes—I had been shot—must have been. I was also under a growing impression that it was Mistress Joyce who had shot me—in defense of the king, of course.

In a little while I opened my eyes again and found that the mist had dispersed somewhat. I was able to recognize the room, remembering which further connected the threads of my affairs, and recalled me to the manor and my reason for being there.

Through half-closed eyes I slowly took in my surroundings. It was Mistress Joyce who was kneeling beside me and applying that coldness to the hot sear on my skull. Ruth Prynne came not within my vision, if indeed she was in the room at all. But the king and the other man—the man of the vaguely familiar voice—were there.

At first I could hardly believe it was the king. He wore Roundhead morion, cuirass, and jackboots. The other man was similarly attired, but his back was to me, and I could not see his face. I would have liked to know who he was. The presence of a Roundhead, other than myself, in that room was distinctly puzzling to my addled wits. But then it might be hallucination—unless the man was a traitor to his Ironside dress and in the Royalist service.

Hallucination, probably; for there was King Charles dressed similarly—King Charles in Roundhead cuirass and jackboots!

I tried to raise myself and partly succeed-

ed. For a moment I swayed on one elbow. Before a pair of soft arms laid me back on the floor, I received several distinct impressions. One was that the king was being urged to haste by the other person in Roundhead armor. Another was that old Falconer, the serving-man, was lying across the threshold of that door by which I had entered; and he looked to be dead.

Then the mist closed before me once more and I sank back upon the floor. But I did not wholly lose consciousness again. I knew that the arm pillowing my head was Joyce's, and that the stranger had noted my recovery of wits. He seemed exasperated.

"... for the safety of the king!" was all I caught of what he said.

"The king's safety requires no such cold deed!" came Joyce's voice, quivering like drawn steel.

Then the king spoke.

"Nay! He is a brave lad, if foolhardy. Let him have his chance, even as I take mine."

That was all. A great wind sprang up which did not disperse the fog, only darkened it with a blood-red tinge, deepening to purple and black.

When a second time I got my wits back, dawn was breaking through a window of little leaded panes against which ivy leaves rustled. I was on a couch, and my head, feeling abnormally large, ached most ferociously.

I became aware that, while I was partly dressed, I had been divested of my russet coat, cuirass, and jackboots. My helmet, naturally, was not on my head. I managed to raise myself enough to look about the room. I had not been in it before. It was not that in which I had been shot. I could not see my coat, or boots, or armor anywhere.

I lay back on a pile of soft cushions and thought as well as I was able to, reconstructing recent matters more clearly.

I had failed in my enterprise, and I had a bullet wound for my rashness. The king had escaped me, and—yes, I now understood the crowning ignominy of my defeat. He had probably escaped to his sympathiz-

ers over the Welsh border, dressed in my russet coat and Roundhead accouterments!

But the mystery of the other man in Roundhead dress remained. Who was that traitor? Where had he appeared from in that room?

I could not make head or tail of him, except that clearly he was a Royalist spy or some bodyguard of the king, wearing Parliamentary trooper attire to escape notice.

Thinking presently made my head ache.

After a little while I heard a slight rustling in the room and opened my eyes to see Mistress Joyce standing by the couch and looking down into my face with much concern. It occurred to me in that moment that I was forever making demands upon her sympathy. Truly I am not the hero of this chronicle.

Seeing me conscious, she drew up a low stool, sat down beside me, and laid a cool hand on my brow.

"Well, Sir Knight-Errant?" she said with a wan smile. "You see? I begged you to forget this house, and—"

"Tell me," I interrupted. "What happened?"

"You were shot," she said quietly; "not seriously, thank God! The bullet only grazed your head, and—" Her eyes filled with a look of horror's memory.

"What happened to old Falconer?"

"It struck him. He is dead," she barely whispered.

"Who fired?"

She did not answer at once; then, quickly:

"What matters that—now? It would not recall poor Falconer to know. And you must not speak overmuch. The fever is still high."

I lay with closed eyes for a few minutes, slowly turning over the matters in my mind. Presently I said:

"Then there were two shots—at least. You could not have fired the ball that struck down Falconer, who was behind you and the king. Yet I thought I saw you shoot."

"I do not understand," she said, her eyes wide with wonder. "But there—do not speak. The fever has not left you."

"I thought you shot me," I said.

She was silent. I opened my eyes and saw her face. It was wrought with amazement and reproach.

"I—shoot you?" she said slowly. Then she smiled with a lovely wistfulness and shook her head. "No—oh, no."

"Who did?"

"I shall go away if you do not keep still," she said, laying her other hand on one of mine that lay limply on my breast.

"Then I shall even be still," I said, my senses drifting pleasantly.

"Sleep," she whispered. "Sleep, Master Brooke—Master Hallam Brooke. The king is gone. He is safe. No harm is done. I know what you strove to effect for my sake. And 'twas your duty also, Master Brooks. I know now. So sleep!—Between you and me there is no cause for enmity now. So sleep, Master Brooke—Master Hallam Brooke—sleep—sleep—"

Her voice, low and crooning, fell upon my senses like balm. I sank into a contented, dreaming muse which was not sleep, rather too sweet for sleep. How long she remained beside me I cannot tell; only that the moment she left me I was conscious of it. The spell went with her presence, and I was again tortured with half-delirious thoughts about my situation.

I had failed in the sense that the king had escaped. I had succeeded in that I had rid Joyce of his too-gallant presence. But I was left in a sad dilemma myself.

The dawn had passed. The sun was up, shining through the little leaded panes where the ivy rustled in the tender June breeze. The camp was long since astir, and Trooper Brooke had not answered at muster-call.

I must return at once. Empty-handed, I would have some difficulty explaining my absence without leave; but return I must ere I was rated deserter, if I was not so posted already. Some luck might enable me to reenter camp unobserved, and I believed that Sergeant Okey and Captain Bombard, both of whom had shown themselves not impartial to me, might deal lightly with my defection.

I might pretend to have fallen from grace and drunk myself senseless in some ale-house. My disheveled looks and broken

head would lend color to such a tale. Some tavern wag had stripped me of my armor in practical jest. The more self-humiliating I made my story the less likely would it be discredited.

Aye, that was the way out of the dilemma! It would mean reprimand, a call to penitence, and a day or two in the guard-house. But what were these if the truth could be covered up? Revelation of the truth meant trouble for my dear mistress—and *I would be shot!*

Therefore, I must return to camp—at once. With this resolve I sprang to a sitting posture on that couch. The violence of the movement drained the blood from my brain. My vision swam and—I fainted!

After that, I learned later, I was delirious with fever. But that delirium was a very sweet experience, racked by no horrid fantasies or torturing, impossible problems. I moved in a world of beautiful colors, where the loveliest music swelled and died, and there were the clearest, cold streams in which to bathe my hot hands and head.

And Mistress Joyce was always with me in those ramblings through tender green woods and over mountains which were lost in the clouds, yet marvelously easy to fly over.

We talked much together, Joyce and I, in these flights. That is, I talked much to her, while she was inclined to be silent and introspective. I do not know how much she remembers of all I said to her. Sometimes I hope she does not. I know that once I took my heart out of my breast, laid it all warm and dripping in her hands, and told her to keep it for me, as I must be gone from her a while. And she wept at my going, and my face became all wet with her tears.

Thus a day and a night elapsed, I have been told since. On the morning of the second day I awoke from the wonderland of delirium, filled with anxiety because I had lost Joyce while in a dense forest.

She was not in the room. Feeling better, although very light-headed, I succeeded in sitting up on the edge of the couch. And again my previous determination returned to make the camp—for I did not know that

nearly two days had passed since I left it. I looked around for my coat, cuirass, and boots. As before, they were missing, but on a chair by the couch lay, neatly folded, a complete dress of very fine material. Unfolding it, I discovered the attire of a cavalier gentleman.

I suspected it was the king's outer dress, left in exchange for the Roundhead habiliments he had borrowed as a disguise.

But now I saw my dilemma made worse and infinitely more humiliating. My ale-house story might be swallowed for truth; but that I should appear in camp after *two days' absence* and attired in the attire of a cavalier gentleman, would take some explaining!

I wished I could see Ruth Prynne for a few moments. Her loyalty was to her mistress, but at heart she was a Puritan, and that heart was with the Parliament's cause and Parliament's trooper, John Bunyan. If I could see her she might be induced to pass the word of my dilemma to Hobgoblin Jack.

He, through Ruth, might smuggle some Roundhead dress to the manor. But that might involve him and the two women in my predicament. Hobgoblin, I knew, would be willing enough, and I would put his willingness to test if I saw an opportunity; but I did not like to make use of either of the women. And of Ruth Prynne I had not caught a glimpse anyway since she stood in that doorway making warning signals which I now understood only too well.

However, I decided that, as a first step, I must get out of the manor, having no more desire to hide there than to involve the dear woman who had nursed me.

Weakly I began to dress in the king's costume. As the minutes passed my head became less light and my blood circulated strength through my limbs.

When I was ready I walked about the room, at first a little uncertainly, but gradually gaining confidence in my legs. Before a looking-glass I paused, and, somewhat startled, regarded a not unhandsome cavalier mirrored there—a not displeasing figure in fine boots, satin breeches, a richly laced coat, and a broad hat in which a plume was fastened with a ruby clasp.

Then I went toward a door and, passing through it, found myself in that chamber where I had encountered the king and subsequent misadventure to myself. I think now it was through this same door that my probable assailant must have stolen upon me from behind.

At my entrance Mistress Joyce and Ruth Prynne rose to their feet. They had been seated opposite each other by the hearth, engaged in some needlework. Mistress Joyce smiled relief and welcome, but Ruth Prynne seemed ill at ease. Joyce turned and made a slight gesture, whereat the Puritan maid immediately left the room.

Then my lady smiled on me again and held out her left hand.

"Thy dress," she said, "pleases me better than it did."

"Then," I said, bending over the hand that I touched with my lips, "I almost forgive the dress. It is, nevertheless, an odd one in which to appear before the army of Parliament."

"Then you return?" she asked quickly.

"There is no other course. What would you have me do, else?"

"But—you are not strong yet—"

"I am already much in thy debt, sweet lady."

Her face crimsoned at some memory. She did not look at me, but the slender, white fingers were not withdrawn from my hand. Gazing through a window at the manor gardens, she said, somewhat confusedly:

"If then—if you are strong enough to leave your chamber, I—I suppose you must go from the house. We are but two women here—"

"Tell me," I said. "Is there aught in which a man better might employ his hands? Falconer."

"No. He is in his grave. There is nothing. You had better go—if you are able."

"You will not tell me who fired that shot?"

"I may not," was the quiet answer.

I bowed. The truce was ended.

I was about to ask her if by any chance Ruth Prynne had been able to convey word of my plight to John Bunyan; but something halted the question. That Joyce had

kept Ruth away from the chamber in which I had been lodged, and that she had sent Ruth from this room when I entered, told me plainly enough that the line of demarcation between the two sides had been more strongly drawn.

What had happened was merely an incident in which Joyce's humanity had overcome her political leanings. The incident was about to be closed. I might look neither to her nor to Ruth Prynne—at least, while that maid ate the salt of Eveleigh Manor—for further help out of my dilemma.

It was Joyce herself who let me out at the kitchen door, and she accompanied me through the kitchen garden to the back gate in the wall.

We were both more or less speechless. I could not find words to express mere gratitude when my heart was so full of things I dared not say.

At the gate I bent once more and kissed her hand. Looking up slowly I saw that her eyelids were drooped and from under the soft lashes two tears were forcing themselves despite.

"Good-by, Master Brooke," she said in a whisper.

"Perhaps," I said, rather huskily, I am afraid. "But—I do not think so. I lost you in a great forest. But I shall find you again."

With that speech, which may have made her think the fever was still upon me, I turned away and walked with rather uncertain gait toward Naseby—less brave than when I started from camp on my rash enterprise.

Nevertheless, despite an undercurrent of uneasiness over my immediate future, I was conscious of a curious thrill of satisfaction and joy.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### CONDEMNED!

MY one hope of entering camp and thereafter suffering a minimum of punishment was to get in communication with my friend, Hobgoblin Jack Bunyan.

But the luck was still against me. Half-way to Naseby I heard the pounding of horses' hoofs coming toward me from the village. The riders were still invisible around a slight bend of the road. Hoping to have a chance to observe them before they saw me, I ran from the road in an effort to reach the shelter of that belt of willows along the trout-stream to my left.

I acted too late, however, and my attempt to hide, failing as it did, was a thing which presently increased the difficulties closing about me like a mesh.

Before I gained the willows there came a shout from the road and a voice commanded me to "Stand!" Had I had my full wits about me I should have risked a shot and run for it, but I came to a standstill when I saw that the leader of the group on the road was no other than Sergeant Okey.

For the moment I suppose I only thought that, next to Jack Bunyan, there was no more friendly acquaintance than Gossip Okey. But then I did not reckon with the sergeant's solemn sense of duty and I did not know—did not think in that moment—that I was already posted a deserter.

"Seize him!" roared Okey. "'Tis the king himself!"

But when Okey saw my face he knew I was not the king, although several moments passed before he recognized *me*. I had made no resistance when I was surrounded, and now I was the center of a group of dismounted troopers, two of whom held me securely by the arms.

When Okey did recognize me his Puritan morality was shocked into a kind of pious fury. I think the man had had a liking for me. To have heard of me as a deserter, and then himself to capture me under the suspicious circumstance of my cavalier costume, aroused him to no sympathy.

"So there ye are, deserter!" he cried. "And I did think ye an honest lad, only fouled by ill company. But what means this popinjay dress? And ye tried to hide afore ye were accused—an ill sign—like to Adam that had a guilty conscience, wore fig-leaves, and hid in the bushes.

"Aha!" he broke off, a new thought dawning upon him. "Desarter, did I say? This ha' the look o' worse. Silence!"

I had not uttered a word: I was speechless.

"I will not hear word from thee!" he roared, but adding less sternly: "For thine own sake; for ye are parlous nigh to a rope as 'tis. But 'tis thy just desert for desertin', for bringing shame upon our company. Noll himself shalt be thy judge! Bind his arms there, Staines. Use thy belt, man! Do thee and Bassett there walk atween ye. The rest of ye—mount!"

So, my arms pinioned with Trooper Staines's belt, I was marched ahead of the company into and through Naseby Village and to our camp.

My passage created some stir. The villagers gathered and followed us to the edge of the military zone, and among the curious eyes that fed on me I saw a pair set in the face of Master Lapham, the tinsmith. His gaze met mine for just a second. In that moment I saw a glimmer of understanding of my predicament and, at the same time, fear for himself through his more or less slight connection with Eveleigh Manor.

The tinsmith averted his eyes almost at once and slipped away among the crowd. There was little except sympathy that Master Lapham could lend me. And that brought home to me a fact which momentarily became more evident—that I could look for more sympathy than assistance from any of my friends, even John Bunyan. None but I could explain in my own defense.

The short passage through the camp to Cromwell's headquarters was a more painful ordeal. On all sides I was met by ominous, hard looks, particularly from the comrades of my own immediate company. I had fouled the nest of my brothers-in-arms: I had placed a blot on the colors of Noll's division: I was a disgrace to the Parliamentary army.

I felt the eyes of every man, except one, accusing me; and that one who did not was the man I was most anxious to behold—Jack Bunyan. I did not see him in the number who watched my humiliating return.

Five minutes later I was standing before Oliver Cromwell, in that house which had

been set aside for his headquarters, Staines and Bassett hemming me on either side, and Sergeant Okey reporting the circumstances of my capture.

Cromwell sat at a plain kitchen table which was littered with papers. He was a heavy-set man, about forty-five years of age, with a brooding face. I cannot describe him, save as he impressed me as a whole in that moment—an iron man with a will and a brain like the mills of God.

He listened to Okey's report in silence, his eyes fixed somberly on my face. Then—

"Summon Captain Slythey," said he.

While Okey went in search of our "Captain Comforter," Cromwell resumed his study of the papers from which he had lifted his eyes at the entrance of me and my escort. He dipped a quill in an ink-horn and made some notes on the papers, his manner preoccupied to the exclusion of me and other minor things.

But he laid aside the papers when Jonas Slythey appeared and saluted with an accompanying unmilitary bowing and scraping while he stole a sidelong glance at me.

Cromwell waved him to one side and addressed me in a hard, slow voice:

"Where have ye been, deserter?"

I was dumb. I could not tell the truth. Such a cock-and-bull story as I had invented about an ale-house would be an insult to *that* intelligence. Also, I was awed by the iron personality of the man.

He did not repeat his question, seeming to draw his own inferences from my silence. But then he asked, pointing with the quill at my breast:

"Where got ye that masquerade?"

Still I remained mute. What *could* I tell him, if not the facts? To tell the truth, that I had had knowledge of the king's whereabouts and did not reveal it, that I had had the king at my pistol-point and let him escape alive, would not improve my situation and assuredly undo all for which I had actually striven.

Cromwell eyed me, his gaze almost clairvoyant in its boring uncanniness. Then he signed Slythey forward and tersely said:

"Repeat the word ye brought this morning."

At Slythey's first words all doubt as to

his real employ was removed. Whatever his occupation in past history—soldier, physician, or preacher—he was now a spy in Cromwell's personal use.

"Craving leave, and with all respect, sir," said Slythey, spreading his hands in deprecating fashion, "the word is but hearsay; yet I had it of one who could hardly be mistaken, he having seen the king many times.

"The word is, sir, that Charles, by the grace of God of Great Britain, France, and—"

Cromwell tapped the table impatiently and scowled.

"The king, I was saying," Slythey went on, "had apparently come from his hiding, which must ha' been near nigh to Naseby, and was seen about midnight—two nights ago, sir—in the disguise of a Roundhead trooper at Sibbertoft, some miles to the northwest.

"He was unaccompanied, sir, and but paused to refresh himself at the inn of Sibbertoft and to obtain a fresh mount from the host, who did recognize him, first by his speech, that of no common trooper, and then by his likeness to the king."

Cromwell nodded, and waved Slythey aside. The general's eyes bored into mine again and once more he surveyed my costume with a kind of ironic contempt for my mental simplicity. Plainly the question in his mind was: Where got the king his disguise, and where I mine?

But he did not ask that question directly. Instead, his eyes moved upward to my head and lingered there a few moments. At length he said:

"Give me that hat!"

Trooper Staines whipped it from my head while Slythey sprang forward, received and laid it before Cromwell with an unctuous smile.

Noll took up the hat from the table and examined it carefully, the rich, purple silk velvet of it, the silver-gray plume, and the latter's fastening—a ruby in a silver setting fashioned to represent a lion, a unicorn, and a crown. On a riband of metal at the base of the clasp were graven words which Cromwell read with a quiet snarl:

*"Dieu et mon Droit!"*

He did not even ask me again how I came by that hat and the rest of my attire. He did not even ask how I came by the wound in my head; which wound was revealed when the hat was removed. Only his boring eyes fastened on the line of slightly matted hair along the right side of my skull. The hard smile on his face deepened when his gaze again dropped to mine.

"I ha' no breath to waste on the stubborn," said he at last. "For the stubborn, stubborn measures. Unless in the mean time it pleases ye to make confession, and

that confession prove a fair price for thy life—ye shall hang on the gallows on the morrow at seven o' the clock!"

That was all. He dipped his quill in the ink-horn and resumed his papers, brushing aside the king's hat to make room for matters of importance.

And I was marched out between Stains and Bassett, Sergeant Okey bringing up the rear, and Jonas Slythey standing aside and bowing me out with a smirking grin.

To the guardhouse I was taken, and there lodged—condemned to die next morning in the presence of all my Ironside comrades.

This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

# Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne's series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, issue of May 22. One will appear in each of our issues throughout the summer months. While each story is complete in itself, all are concerned with the adventures of that likable blackguard, Captain Teach—descendant of the notorious pirate Blackbeard—and charming Mary Arncliffe.

## X—THE SHEEP-STEALER

"YOUNG Arncliffe," said Admiral Teach, "died to make England a fit place for shirkers to live in. That is why I have not been hard on his father in return for all the unpleasantness he has raised in my direction.

"Also, I intend to marry his daughter,

Mary, and it is just as well not to twist one's father-in-law's tail beforehand. I never knew young William Arncliffe. I wish I had. He was a splendid lad by all accounts. They're a splendid family all round."

Lord Raisghyll tossed a glowing stub

into space and blew smoke rings over the Atlantic. It was a hot, still Sunday evening, and a section of that ocean lay almost directly beneath his feet, three hundred feet lower down.

The rest of the occupants of St. Kilda were inside the four gray stone walls of the Wee Free Kirk, away down at the edge of Village Bay. Lord Raisghyll fished in his pocket for another cigarette, and held out his hand for matches. He did not seem burdened either with ideas or desire for speech.

"Frankly, I shouldn't mind now how soon things were settled down. I want to marry that girl without any more waiting."

"Um," said his lordship.

"I'll admit, if you like, I've been a nuisance in the past. I'm being a nuisance at present. I shall go on being a nuisance during the indefinite future till I get my own terms.

"That Irish Republican Navy stunt has set you and the Yankees and everybody else by the ears. Come now. You're here to buy me off. You know the terms. Is it a deal?"

"Rotten matches, these," said Lord Raisghyll. "I've had to strike five."

"Then come down to the yacht and get another box," said Teach, who was a man of short patience. "I shall sail before sundown. There are bad tides running outside, and I don't want to pile her up on any of those stone yards. I'm too much of a steamer sailor to feel comfortable in a sixty-ton schooner."

"Right-o," said Lord Raisghyll. "I'll give you lessons. My Foam will stand on her heels and jazz for you when you get to know her. But you got to know her fust.

"I'll teach you a thing or two about steering with a tiller and a tackle before I'm through with you, Teddy, my lad. She also, amongst her stores, carries a keg of prewar whisky—a thing not to be despised in these chaotic days of unclean ideals."

"You are leaving my points unanswered."

"I am. I'll admit to you that the gray matter is churning inside my skull. And

it may churn slowly. But it churns exceeding small.

"Come along and let's get aboard before the local citizen comes out of his one place of amusement. I hate to meet people emerging from church when I haven't been there myself. Lord help us? What's the meaning of that?"

"That" was a four-funneled, high-bowed destroyer which cleared the western horn of the bay at a gentle thirty knots, and swung up toward the anchorage.

The pirate admiral looked out.

"I suppose it means somebody thinks he's got me in a trap and wants to do a little hanging. Have I you to thank for this pleasant little surprise?"

"Don't be impertinent, Teach. I gave you a safe conduct, and you know I'd cut my throat sooner than go back on a promise. Also, don't get the wind up.

"You were Captain Cam on the Foam, and if anybody wants to know, I don't see why Cam you shouldn't remain. The odds are that joker has merely come in to bring the St. Kildians a parcel of newspapers, and hopes to get a bucket of fish for the wardrobe dinner in exchange.

"But he won't get fish. These excellent islanders are too idle to catch those. They'll do the generous with half-a-dozen brace of stinking fulmar petrels instead. Come along and be affable."

"I shall not. If I'm Cam there's no reason I shouldn't ramble off amongst the cliffs to find out where those same smelly seafowl breed. It's a sort of thing that Cam, the idle dog, might very well do. Nothing odd about Cam gone birdnesting. Then if by any chance it was Teach they were after, he'd get that much start."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"Thank you," said the pirate, "but I don't intend to be shot sitting. I quite take your word for it, Raisghyll, that you've been acting entirely on the straight. But what about some of your beastly political friends going round the back of you?"

"Look there! There's the whaler called away to board your blooming Foam. Now, does that look like paying an afternoon call on His Extreme Magnificence, the Earl of Raisghyll?"

"Heh!" said that nobleman thoughtfully. "Teddy, that blasted home office had done me in. I need hardly point out to you that if you're coming to grief, I've got to be shot first. So you must please just consider me a clinging Ruth for the present."

The pirate's dark face grew a shade less grim.

"No, no, Raisghyll. That's all right. I know quite well you are far too much of a good fellow to give me away.

"But they haven't got me yet, though I must admit this island's only about as big as a tea-tray, and the chances are slim. But get you back to your ship. I'm not going to drag you into it further."

"My dear Teddy, nobody these days talks of his honor, except in books. But that's the item that's involved. Do you think I could show my nose in Brown's or anywhere else respectable if I stood back and let you have your run alone? Nothing doing.

"Besides, as it happens, I know this bit of rock and turf pretty intimately. Been here for a fortnight once with a couple of egging chaps after Leach's fork-tailed petrel and our niffy friend, the fulmar, and I can tell you more about the local fleas than you'd believe. We'll just slip round to the back of the factor's house and take an observation from there. The track leads to nowhere that way, so if they do send a search party ashore, they'll hunt through the village first and out in the other direction. I say, do look."

"What at?"

"Navy officer jumps on deck and demands the bleeding scalp of the pirate Teach. That chap who met him is my own man. He's keen on yachting, so I always bring him along as steward and general utility man.

"He's a saucy devil. I can just picture him saying that his lordship wouldn't demean himself by entertaining any but the best people on board the Foam, and the Captain Cam, what was the only guest, was an old and valued friend we'd known for years.

"I respect the powers of the British navy, but I know my fellow's tongue.

4 A.

He'll give us half an hour. Teddy, my lad, we'd best be moving."

Forty miles west of North Uist was the position of St. Kilda when I last put in a fortnight there, and I have no reason to suppose it has drifted from its moorings since, in spite of the unceasing efforts of the Atlantic swells to shift it. The inhabitants speak a variety of Gaelic peculiar to themselves, and are members of the narrowest sect of the Wee Frées.

In normal times they live upon sea gulls' eggs, sea gulls, and that other branch of the gull family, the bi-annual Glasgow tripper, and they are inhabited by more fleas per head of population than any other branch of the human race. They have no English, but in his spare time their worthy meenister is teaching them Latin.

For the rest they are the descendants of the criminals transported to St. Kilda from Skye by that feudal lord, Macleod of Macleod, and still possess many remarkable characteristics. St. Kilda is, I believe, some seven miles in circumference, but as its outline is far too untidy to measure, this figure is a doubtful one.

Further, the islanders possess exactly one boat, and they are the most inefficient boatmen who have so far escaped drowning. I know they scared me very thoroughly.

The one landing place is Village Bay, and there only when the swells are not running in that direction. There are two other spots where one can get ashore at the risk of a leg or a neck, but I do not recommend them. All the rest of the isle is walled against the sea by high precipitous cliffs, standing in deep green water.

Teach and Lord Raisghyll worked their way out from the back of the factor's house, keeping carefully in cover. His lordship was a notable grouse shooter and deer-stalker, and went up the slopes like a cragsman.

But Teach was a fourteen stone man of the sea, and when it came to rising, hummocky ground, he "drave heavily." But he was a man of immense physical power, and showed no sign of flagging. Also, of course, there was a hanging ready for him if he was caught, and although no halter

has ever dangled for me, so far as I know, I can quite imagine it would be a stimulant. (In my case the other fellows wanted to shoot me.) A handy flurry of cloud also came to help them.

They reached a roughly built cleet, crawled inside, and lay down on drying turf. Teach produced his big black pipe. Lord Raisghyll lit his equally inevitable cigarette.

"How many men will that destroyer carry?"

"Perhaps eighty," said Teach.

"They'll leave, say, ten on board to keep shop, and arm the balance and turn them adrift to hunt the island."

"That's cheerful."

"May as well face the facts. St. Kilda's small, but the bigger part of it is standing on end. Besides, 'Jack ashore' you know. It'll be a slow job. No reason for us to hustle yet awhile.

"Let's try and worry out a sound plan of operations. The ancient inhabitant of St. Kilda, before the small-pox cleared them out, were troglodytic in their tastes and lived in dugout houses all over the shop. I know of one of those, not far from here, that we could crawl into. I expect snaring sea fowl will be beyond us. But we can lift a sheep to two to keep us going.

"The main trouble will be drink. The only spring I know of hereabouts is a muddy puddle at the back of the village."

"It's a poor scheme," the pirate decided.

"The navy's not a fool. Sooner or later they will dredge us out if we stay on this island. If this present destroyer lot can't do it, they'll ring up the rest of the fleet. But they'll go through St. Kilda with a small comb and don't you make any error about that.

"Best to face the facts, as I say. If there was any likelihood of a ship coming near this blasted island, I'd swim off and take my chance of being picked up."

"There isn't. That's why we came here."

"I must say you're helpful."

"To quote your own words, Teddy, one's got to face facts."

"I like the suggestion of surrender from you," said Teach significantly. (Students

of the Great War will remember Major, the Earl of Raisghyll, D. S. O., as C. O. of that Guards battalion, which after the manner of the Guards, when other regiments had failed, were ordered into a tight place and told to hold it to the last man. They held it—in spite of many invitations to surrender—expensively for themselves, and extremely expensively for the Hun. Major Lord Raisghyll, and thirty-two others survived, as you will recall, out of 960.)

"My great grandfather, as you know, got into a tight place off Charlestown, Carolina, as his finish, and neither surrendered nor shot himself. He fought it out.

"I'm quite open to doing the same if called upon. But I don't want to for two reasons. First, I should damage the navy in the process, and I'd hate to do that because they are good fellows. And second, I want to get away, and marry Mary Arncliffe, and live quietly and respectably.

"Probably you still think I'm merely a bloody-minded pirate, Raisghyll. But I can assure you I've as much of a hankering for a quiet fireside and kids at my knee as the other fellow. Only trouble is, I've always been short of cash. If I'd been you, I'd have been every bit as respectable as you are, only more so, because at times, here for instance, and that day in Flanders you've shown habits that no self-respecting millionaire peer should have.

"However, we are getting off the subject. What's the nearest land?"

"Stacks Borrerah, Lee, and Soay. They're just humps of rock sticking out of the water. Sheep on the first and last. Landing difficult.

"Next nearest is North Uist, and that's some forty miles away. Think you can swim forty miles in cold North Atlantic water?"

"It oughtn't to be too cold. It's the tail end of the Gulf Stream. What about these two other rocks? The ones with the sheep on them, I mean. How far are they?"

"Borrerah and Soay? Depends on where you start from. If you commence your swim by taking a header off a three-hundred foot cliff, they're not far. If you are going to row round from Village Bay, it's a long pull.

"But as Village Bay is out of bounds in the present competition, we needn't worry about that. You may take it they're both impossible to reach."

"Then I'm going to Soay," said Teach.

"I tell you it can't be done."

"That's highly likely. But I'm going to have a hard try for it. So here we'll say good-by. I'm tremendously obliged, old man, for the way you've stuck to me. I hope you don't get into a bother over it."

I sha'n't. If you're going to be damned fool enough to try this Soay stunt, I'm going to be ditto, and here and now I'll bet you an even fiver that if we swim off level, I'm there ahead of you."

"That's a bet," said Teach. "Come along. Let's get out of this before we have the navy smelling round."

Up the gray grassed slopes they went again, with Richardson's skuas darting menacingly past their heads, and Leach's fork-tailed petrels skimming in and out of the puffin' holes. The air was bitter with the scent of the fulmars, and sour with the general aroma of guano. Even the never-failing scour of the Atlantic breeze can never rid St. Kilda of its scent.

Moreover, they scratched themselves vigorously as they walked. The St. Kildian flea is the most voracious of his kind, and in number he excels the sands on the sea's shores.

Then they came to rocks, greasy with wet, and slimed by sea-fowl. The climb grew dangerous. But the peer was a climber and the sailor was a sailor and they avoided accident. So in due time, climbing by crevice and chimney, they came near the cliff foot opposite Soay.

A great St. Kilda wren sat with tail fiercely cocked, chittering after them. The wren knew that her peculiar eggs were worth five shillings apiece in the collectors' market, and mistook them for dealers' agents. No other human being, the St. Kildian wren decided, would be fools enough to climb to that desperate place in the rocks.

The last twenty feet was sheer, with green water churning itself into white at the foot. "And here," said Lord Raisghyll, "is where I take off my boots."

"Bide a bit," said the pirate and took out his watch. "Let me try and think out the run of the tides. Heave overboard that nest that's near you, and let's see what happens— Yes, I thought so."

"The flood's still making, and if we got in the ditch now, we should go the wrong way at the rate—the rate of some five miles an hour. Also it isn't dark, and the navy's got eyes."

"And we should be conspicuous? Quite so. *Rari nantes in gurgite vasto*. I got into Pop at Eton for being the only man who ever construed that bit of Vergil wrong without getting licked. I won't offer you a cigarette, as I know you always stick to your beastly pipe."

"I wish my case was water-tight. Better fettle it here, I suppose. Every ounce of extra weight is going to tell tremendously."

"If that double-yoked wren doesn't stop cursing us," said Teach, "I shall heave a rock at it. I never saw the like of it before, but I'm sailor enough to dislike any fowl's disapproval."

The swim, when they came to it, was a desperate one. There was little wind, but in that narrow strait between the islets the Atlantic boiled, and swirled, and sucked over the rocky bottom like a mill race; it displayed every variety of tide-rip and overfall; and the swimmers were, as often as not, battling their way among fish, ten feet beneath the yeasty surface. Moreover, despite its Gulf Stream origin, the water carried a deadly chill.

Both were hardy athletes, in the exact prime of life; and they were tried and stubborn fighters; or they never could have stood it. As it was, they made Soay by the barest inch, and for a pin's value the other way, the tearing fingers of the sea would have torn them past even the outer fringes of its weed.

But the weed found its way into their drowning clutches, and each, on the shoulder of a swell, dragged himself up onto the rock.

There is an iron peg let into the stone above that landing-place on Soay. Teach pointed a shaking finger at it.

"A minute ago," he chattered, "I'd have given £5000 for a rope's end made fast to that. Well, we're here. Let's get away out of sight. The navy can see through the dark, and you can bet it's looking."

His lordship hiccupped sea water.

"Life's a great game," said he between spasms. "Come along, and we'll steal a Soay sheep and devour it raw for supper. They look a bit like fallow deer, the sheep here, and eat like leather. I know because I once tried.

"Also let's get out of this wind. I can find a bit of an old cave-dwelling that will be nice and warm, and full of fleas, to welcome us. By gad, two minutes ago I thought it would be shrimps and not nice homey fleas that would be feeding on me.

"Teddy, my man, let this experience be a warning to you. Always carry your baccy and matches in a water-tight box. It is sad to think how many fine men (like ourselves) have been led to smokelessness by neglecting that simple precaution."

Now, if this was a moral tale, which it is not, being merely history, I should have to wind up with Right triumphant, and show the British navy hanging Teach to the modern equivalent of a yard-arm, which is probably a davit.

Unfortunately, however, the navy now drops out. Wrong, which I suppose is typified by Edward Teach, triumphed. But the chance which got him off was such a very outside one that it is not likely to be repeated.

Skipper George Hubberhome, of the steam trawler Mary Crookeacre, put out from Fleetwood intending to fish Rockall Bank. He started short of provisions, as he was hard-up, and proposed to live on fried halibut, which he detested.

A misty sky and a westerly gale set him to eastward of his course, and he picked up St. Kilda as a landfall instead of the white hump of Rockall. Thereafter, being a dalesman and loathing a fish diet, his mouth watered after mutton, and when the trawl was down, and the Mary Crookacre was chugging along after her appointed business, he got her boat overside and set off in her, with two cousins for crew.

I gather they had an ugly time bouncing up and down beside the seaweed-faced rock before they managed to heave the bight of a rope over the iron peg on Soay which helps intending immigrants to land.

It was George Hubberhome who scraped ashore. The two cousins were pleased enough to push off the boat before she got stove in, and wait for him in decent deep water.

The time was night, but George was a dalesman born, and a sheep user by upbringing. He used his nose, and he used his eyes, and he used his wits on this unknown Soay, and within thirty minutes he had pulled down an animal, and cut its throat with an artistic butcher's touch.

And: "Good God," said George Hubberhome, "why don't they import a Wensleydale pup and breed a sheep here worth calling a sheep? This thing looks like a greyhound, and I will bet eats as such. Hullo, who the hell are you? I tell you I intended to pay for it."

"Naughty, naughty!" said Lord Raisghyll, "John Willie, too, who has always been my favorite, this last twenty years."

"Hullo, you," said the butcher, but did not see the man who had spoken. Teach elbowed his friend into the background. Teach always was vain.

"Ah," said the latest invader, "seems to me I know your portrait from a photo that's been put in all the picture papers recently. Anyway, you're not a St. Kildian. You're not hairy enough, for one thing, and too wet, for another. The St. Kilda men never wash."

"I'm Admiral Teach."

"Captain Teach? Are you, now, mister? Well, being a reading man between trips, I've heard a lot about you. And I recognized you from your picture."

"I'm afraid that's unavoidable. Well, my man, I want a service of you. I wish you to put me aboard that trawler. I've something to say to the skipper."

"The skipper's here now talking to you, mister. So spit it out."

"I've my own ship waiting for me at a point I will tell you about when we get on board. I wish you to shove me across to her. You will get £5000 for your services."

"So the Littondale's near here, is she, mister? And you offer £5000 cash down and no bills nor nothing like that for a cast across? Well, Captain Teach, I don't hold with pirates, and never did and never shall."

"And you a sheep-stealer, George," Lord Raisghyll cut in. "How unneighbourly!"

"You shut up, mister, and let me talk to the dark gent. I don't hold with pirates, being a sailorman now, and a farmer only occasionally. But I'm going to give you a lift now you ask me for one, and here's the reason why: Here's us on the Mary Crook-acre, joined up for the duration at the word 'go,' and done what we could mine-sweeping, and let me tell you that's no kid's job. Very well, mister. I'm not kicking, and wear a medal, as you see. It was necessary, and we done our whack."

"Next we was demobbed, and was due for a gratuity, which is still owing. But we being government navy, and not plain trawler-man, earned about one-tenth what the trawlers did during the war."

"Well, being demobbed, we needed repairs— You'd have thought we'd been let get 'em first. Nothing in it, mister."

"Peace had been fixed up and the U-boats moored in Scapa, but the government Navy didn't know it. So it was carry on, full-speed ahead, with their new navy construction, and the trawler repairs could go to hell. There was graft somewhere, of course, and somebody was getting a stiff bit out of those government navy repairs, and could expect nothing out of ours."

"That's all likely enough," Teach admitted.

"Quite so, mister. Well, I want to see those grafters shifted, and as it seems, Captain Teach, you're giving them annoy-

ance over this Irish foolery you've started, I'm open to help you when you want, though I tell you again, that piracy, which is what you're really after, I've no use for whatever. To my mind, it isn't a business respectable brought-up people should touch.

"So that fixes you up, Captain Teach—or Admiral, if you wish it, and are so qualified. But it's really Mr. Dick here I've got a friendliness for, though he'll have forgotten me."

"The devil!" said Lord Raisghyll. "I thought I knew your voice. Why, George, you rotten old poacher, there's no mistaking those sweet Hubberhome tones, though I couldn't fix which of you it was at first."

"Lord! How long ago was it you gave over pinching the gov'nor's grouse, and went away to mend your habits at sea? I'm glad you cleared when you did. Sheep stealing got very prevalent in the dale after you left, and there was a nasty feeling about amongst the farmers. You seem to have flourished."

"She's my trawler, Mr. Dick, and I've a bit put by in the bank ashore besides. May I ask if you are—er—in business with this 'ere Admiral Teach? You was always a wild young devil, Mr. Dick. That's why we who know you say you're the only man in the cabinet we can trust. We always know you go ahead your own way—which is straight—and don't care for anybody."

"It puzzled me a bit, of course, to find you with this Captain—or is it Admiral?—Teach, Mr. Dick. But I'm clean sure you're doing what's right. You aren't one of those politicians."

"Well, let's get down to the boat and be off to the Mary Crookacre. I've got a bottle of gin on board, which I fancy will be welcome."

## PLEASURES OF HOPE

BY CAMPBELL

WHY do those cliffs of shadowy tint appear  
 More sweet than all the landscape smiling near?  
 'Tis distance lends enchantment to the view,  
 And robes the mountains in its azure hue.

# Beware of the Bride by Edgar Franklin

Author of "Don't Ever Marry," "His Word of Honor," "The Wicked Streak," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

MARY, three months married to William Emerson, was on her honeymoon—but she wasn't entirely happy. Bill had been combining business with honeymooning, and Mary thought that there was too much business in the combination. She and Bill were to sail for Europe as soon as they reached New York, and be away for a year, yet when she wanted to stop off for a few hours in Braydon—where she had been too popular to suit Bill!—to say good-by to her parents, her husband became furiously jealous. Relenting, he agreed that she could take an earlier train than his the next morning, spends a few hours with her parents—and no others!—and meet him on the train that passed through Braydon at ten twenty-two that evening.

While Mary had been away fortune had smiled on the firm of Noble & Henning, the young members of which had been numbered among Mary's most ardent admirers. Peter Noble had taken advantage of these smiles by acquiring a wife, Sally; and his partner soon was to marry Dolly Hayes.

It so happened that the day of Mary's unexpected visit was also the day of a masquerade ball that was to mark the happy conclusion of a feud that had disrupted Braydon society for a generation. Also it happened that Mrs. Peter Noble was away on a short visit; that Mary met no one she knew on the way from the station; and that when she reached her old home she found no one but old and crusty Uncle Arthur there—her parents were away at a health resort.

Now, of course, Peter and Thomas had given their hearts elsewhere—but they had heard that Mary was in town from a cousin of Peter's. So—just for old-time's sake—Thomas called. He asked Mary to go to the ball, but Dolly was a little jealous on the Mary subject, and he didn't insist. Then when he had gone Peter appeared. And Peter induced her to attend the ball with him, arranging for her to dress with his sister Nellie in his apartment, and for them to meet him at the ball. He would wear a suit of armor; she would be masked so that no one would recognize her; he would take her to the station in time for her train—and no one but his sister would be the wiser. Against her better judgment Mary consented.

The first slip came when the costumer told Peter that the only suit of armor had been hired by some one else. Then, as Peter checked Mary's bag at the station, he met the superintendent of his factory, learned that the structure was threatened by a flood, jumped on a train and forgot the presence of women in the world.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL.

AS there is a reason for everything else, so there was an excellent reason for Peter's failure to connect with the desired suit of armor. The reason's name was Thomas Henning.

Always a trifle spectacular in his tastes, the conventional thing made no more appeal to Thomas as he inspected the Kratz stock of fancy costumes than at any other time.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 17.

There was an assortment of reliable Indian Chief outfits and a Roman Gladiator suit which was quite showy, if one owned the figure and wished to put it on display. There were some Highland clothes recommended warmly by Kratz and a Dutch Boy costume that was really too cute, did one desire to be really too cute.

Further than this there was a selection of Henry the Eighth's and Pilgrim Fathers and the like which, considering the lateness of the hour and the heavy drain of the

day, did genuine credit to the Kratz establishment; yet, one after the other, Thomas passed them by with the briefest consideration, until Kratz shrugged his shoulders and said:

"I dunno, Mr. Henning. Them are all popular suits. What's wrong with 'em?"

"No punch—they're old stuff," said Thomas, and wandered on.

"How about one of these here swell Cavalier costumes, then, with high boots and pink tights and a plumed hat and—"

"Rotten!" said Thomas. "I've got to have something real."

Kratz, elderly, and by nature a sour, taciturn person, ceased his efforts and took to folding up costumes. Thomas opened a closet, which contained ladies garments exclusively, and closed it again. There was a big pasteboard box on the farther shelf; he lifted the lid and gazed for a moment, to turn then with a delighted grin.

"This is it, Kratz!" he said briefly.

"Wrap this one up for me."

"Which one?"

"The armor!"

"You couldn't have that."

"Why not?"

"It's rented already," Kratz said briefly.

"Now, give a look at this Continental Soldier outfit, Mr. Henning, and—"

"Too modern!" Thomas chuckled.

"This tin suit of clothes is the one I'm wearing this evening."

"I told you, Mr. Henning—"

"I know, Kratz, but it didn't get over," Thomas said blithely. "I'm wise, you know. You're saving this for some old bird who won't bring it back full of dents."

"That's all right. I'll guarantee to return it in perfect condition. I'll leave a deposit on it if you like. Wrap it up."

"No, but this is on the level," Kratz said earnestly. "This suit was rented more than a week ago, and the party's been out of town and he ain't called for it yet. He said he mightn't send for it till late this afternoon."

"Kratz, you ought to have a bazaar somewhere in the Orient," Thomas sighed. "What does it rent for?"

"Five dollars, but that ain't the point. I—"

Yes, it is. I'll give you ten. Do it up.

This time he reached for the box of armor and not without a little effort, laid it on the table before Mr. Kratz, where it settled with divers cheery clankings from within. The costumer merely shook his head.

"No, Mr. Henning, that ain't the point," he said, rather sadly. "The party that engaged this suit is a prominent and wealthy young fellow, and he brings me a lot of business, first and last. I couldn't take no chances of offending him. I promised to keep that suit till he called for it."

Thomas extracted a ten dollar bill from his wallet, and one of his cards as well. On the latter he scribbled for a moment; then he extended both of them to the costumer.

"Now, listen, Kratz," he said patiently. "I want that armor and I'm going to take it with me, see? I'm the only man in the world who'd go after a masquerade costume as late as this, anyway; all the rest of the town's dressing by this time, and if your man hasn't sent for his tinware, it means that he isn't back and that he isn't coming back in time for the ball. Is he?"

The costumer eyed the banknote sadly.

"I couldn't say. This young feller—"

"You've got his five dollars. He'll probably make you hand it back, anyway. Why, then, let a perfectly good costume stay here in its box all evening, when it might as well be earning you ten—and possibly fifteen—dollars?"

"Now, there's a card with my home telephone number on it. If by any chance your man should come back, telephone me and I won't dress and you can send your boy up with any old suit and I'll hand back your armor and wear it instead. Get me?"

"This young feller—"

"Does it go or doesn't it?" Thomas inquired.

Kratz blinked his hard eyes and cleared his throat.

"Listen, Mr. Henning," said he. "If I rent you this suit, and this young feller comes back and wants it, I get the suit back without no trouble?"

"Absolutely!"

"Even if you got it on already?"

"Even if I'm at the ball in it and dancing in it!" Thomas stated.

"Because this young feller that rented it already—"

"Say, Kratz," said Thomas Henning, mildly, "you know—don't you?—that in about one minute more I'm going to lose patience and tell you and your armor where you can go?"

Mr. Kratz accepted the ten dollar bill and reached for the roll of wrapping paper.

Thus it came that Thomas left the establishment with a rather bulky pasteboard box, well wrapped, under his arm—a box so bulky, indeed, that before he reached home, a shining film was upon his well-cut forehead and his curly hair curled the tighter.

But it was worth the bother and the exertion! This Tommy had known at the time, but he knew it still better when, eventually, he stood before his mirror fully arrayed. As a costume, this one was a winner!

New, impressively shining, it had been contrived for purely modern uses. Shimmering chain mail filled all the gaps between the main plates; with the last buckle pulled tight and the vizor down, Thomas himself had vanished altogether.

He laughed richly inside his helmet as he viewed the reflection through the eyelits. Other young men at Braydon's big ball, however carefully they might dress for the evening, were bound to leave a clue or two by which intimate friends might guess accurately at their identity; of the whole crew Thomas Henning would be the only one in an absolutely impenetrable disguise. He shook merrily and slapped his iron thigh with his rather crude iron glove!

Later, with his foot gear and his head-gear in a neat bundle and the rest of his hardware concealed beneath a long raincoat, Thomas clanked inconspicuously into a taxicab and went to call for Dolly Hayes. Later still, when he had reveled in her rare beauty, as enhanced by the Dresden China gown made for the occasion, he made his way to the big affair with Dolly.

And, as Thomas reflected almost wonderingly, it was indeed some ball!

The whole world seemed to be on hand, dancing dizzily in every costume conceivable to the mind of man or woman. In an odd, indefinable way, one particularly old-fashioned girl seemed to stand out.

At first it might have been chance, but after his third dance with Dolly Hayes, Thomas concluded that the old-fashioned girl was deliberately lurking in his neighborhood. He did not know her, but he she whom she might, the old-fashioned girl was a creature of marked bad taste.

Although the records inform us that old-fashioned girls never did that sort of thing, this one beyond a peradventure was trying to flirt with Richard III, otherwise Thomas Henning, a visibly engaged man.

## CHAPTER IX.

### MARY DECIDES.

MARY dined alone with her uncle. This in itself explains much.

Out there on the veranda, after Peter's going, after Maggie's return with the dinner things, Mary had waved madly, astonishingly, for a long time. She dare not go—and yet she craved to go and see it all—and still, she dared not go!

Indeed, she must not go, because she had promised Billy to eschew anything of that sort. Although going could not possibly do any harm, what Billy had meant was that she mustn't permit them to start parties in her honor or take her to places remote from the station. Well, this party certainly was not in her honor and the house where they were holding it was nearly half-way between this house and the station!

So that, if she did go, she would be that much nearer the station and stand just that much less chance of missing Billy! Really, that was a point one ought to consider. And Billy knew Uncle Arthur quite well, too, and the last thing that he would ask of Mary was that she sit at home and listen to uncle's snore.

In fact, for a brief space Mary felt quite certain that, could Billy know the circumstances of this evening, he would be the very first to urge her to go and enjoy herself! After which, she shook her head and

smiled sadly. She could not thus deceive herself: she knew quite well that she would not attend.

However, it could do no harm to slip up to the attic and look at those old gowns of Great-grandma Lawson's. That much Mary might permit herself, so she sped very quietly to the attic and opened the trunk; and under the light of the swinging incandescent she drew out the quaint old silk gown with its great green flowers, memento of a gay, long-gone girlhood, and draped it over her slender figure and looked down wistfully at the result.

The big comb and the thick black lace scarf were in there, too; had she been going to the ball, she could have drawn back her hair and covered it with the scarf and been reasonably safe from recognition.

Absently, almost involuntarily, Mary rolled up gown, scarf and comb. As if the Evil One had laid them there, paper and string seemed to hurl themselves upon her notice. Mary stared fascinatedly at them and pondered.

Now, it was just barely possible that she might change her mind after all; and in that case she might not have another opportunity to slip up here for the things without attracting attention. Merely as a precautionary measure, it might be as well to make up her little package and drop it down to the thick shrubbery beside the house. Shakily, Mary did so—and almost immediately started down-stairs, to recover them and take them back to the attic.

In the lower hallway she encountered Maggie, who bore the news that Uncle Arthur was already seated and things getting cold. So, as has been noted, Mary dined alone with her uncle.

Long before dessert, she had gained full poise. Be the useless sacrifice of inclination what it might, she would not play Billy false, even in the smallest thought. She would stay right here with her uncle, chatting about family matters until train-time. The smile she forced was really brilliant in its martyred serenity; yet Uncle Arthur, scraping his way back from the table, met it with a sharp:

"You got anything special on your mind, Mary?"

Mary started.

"Why—no!" she said, and flushed slightly. "Why do you ask that?"

"You ain't?"

"No!"

"What made you jump and turn red, then?" Uncle Arthur asked, with point.

"I—didn't do either of those things!" Mary stammered.

"Huh?"

"I said I didn't do either of those things."

"You did both," her uncle corrected, and shook his head dubiously and did not cease his peering. "Listen here, Mary! I'm an old man with a good deal of experience. If there is anything, you may as well come out with it now as later on. You had some trouble with your husband?"

"Certainly not!"

"You laying pipes to have some, then?"

"What in the world do you mean by that?" Mary cried.

"Mary, you were always a flirt!" the old gentleman said, pleasingly. "I don't say it's so, but it looks to me as if you might have come back here to—"

"I came to say good-by to mother and dad!" Mary said hotly.

"You took good care to land when they wasn't here, and I heard at least two young fellers talking to you out there, in the hour you were sitting on the porch! They woke me up!"

"If you dare—" Mary began.

"Pah!" said her uncle, with his peculiar little whinny. "I guess I dare enough to keep an eye on you!"

Yet now he arose and reached for his newspaper.

"You don't start till around ten, you said?"

"A little before that."

"Wake me up when you're ready to go, and I'll take you to the station."

"You—you aren't going to sleep again?" Mary faltered.

"Nap," said her uncle, briefly. "Not a wink all last night, with the devilish cats yowling out back. Wake me up."

"Oh, if you're comfortable when I'm ready, I won't bother you," Mary said, with straining sweetness.

"You'll wake me up, d'ye hear?" her uncle corrected astonishingly and thumped the table with his fist. "Maybe there is and maybe there ain't something queer about this flying visit of yours, Mary; like enough we'll find that out later! But no respectable girl goes wandering around alone after dark and particularly no girl in the Lawson family!"

"See here, uncle!" Mary cried, with considerable warmth. "I'm married now and fully able to—"

"Huh?" snapped her uncle. "So much the worse! You'll stay inside this house till you're ready to go, and then you'll wake me up and I'll go with you!"

Muttering, he shuffled away. Once more the springs of the faithful old couch creaked their welcome to his anatomy. Once more, after two or three minutes of suspense, the opening snore of the barrage vibrated through the house and—oh, it was impossible! Mary bounced from her chair and sped to the dark, soothing stillness of the veranda, breathing hard and with eyes snapping.

How did that ridiculous old—er—how did Uncle Arthur dare speak to her like that? What on earth did his suspicious old mind think was afoot? Mary grew warmer and warmer. And it wasn't Uncle Arthur alone; it was Billy, too!

Why, from the way Billy Emerson had spoken to her only yesterday, one might have fancied that she was about the most abandoned flirt in the world! Was it Mary's fault if people liked her and she liked people? Why, if her dad had ever heard either of those men speak that way, he'd have rolled back the sleeves from his powerful arms and just—yes, he would!

What was really a savage little laugh came from Mary's lips. In this world of sin and suffering, if one has the name, one might just as well have the game, too! And the impertinent still small voice, which suggested that this was just about the excuse Mary had been looking for, might go and do its whispering elsewhere! Mary declined to listen. No, indeed, if *that* was what they thought of her—

In a cozy living-room on the fifth floor of the Cypria Apartments, presently, a

cool, handsome, fine-featured young woman, who was Miss Helen Noble, laid aside her book and went to answer the buzzer at the door, the spangles of her Gipsy costume jingling the while. Whatever doubt may have existed in Mary's mind as to her ultimate arrival at Peter's flat, there had been none at all in the mind of Peter's sister.

She had, in fact, been expecting Mary these last ten minutes; she had been thinking in her own cool, unimpassioned way that it was just a shade foolish and risky, in a town like Braydon, for a visiting bride to do her dressing in the flat of a male friend, however perfect the chaperonage.

Yet, at the very first sight of Mary's sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks, as she slipped in with her big bundle, Nelly put her arms about her and kissed her joyfully. That was the way people in general felt about Mary.

They chatted briskly as Mary dressed in Sally Noble's little boudoir. They pinned and buttoned on the aged gown for a time; until Peter's sister had done her part and—ever the soul of punctilious neatness—gathered up Mary's lovely light-gray traveling suit, draped it carefully upon a hanger and said:

"See, dear! I'll put it right in this closet, in front."

"I see, Nell," said Mary, who was rather absorbed in her own reflection in the mirror just then. "How do I look?"

Miss Noble turned a critical eye upon the party dress of 1840 and nodded approval; she examined the queerly-done hair and the scarf and nodded again; but her eyes, roaming downward, contracted suddenly and she frowned.

"It's perfect, all but the feet and legs," she said candidly. "They'll never do!"

"Why?"

"I'm sure they never wore high gray-suede shoes like that in those days, Mary," said Helen. "Those shoes spoil the whole get-up. And by the way, everybody in town will recognize you the second they see them, too!"

"But—"

"Oh, yes, they will, my child! There isn't another female in our crowd who

wears a two, double-A," Peter's sister said dryly. "Oh, no, those shoes are awful, Mary. You'll have to get something that comes nearer to the idea of the rest of the costume."

"But I can't, now," Mary cried, almost brokenly. "There's no time."

"Don't despair," Helen cautioned, with a meditative smile. "Maybe we won't have to hunt very far. You and Peter's wife have been bosom friends all your lives, Mary, and she's the best-natured thing in the world."

"Well?"

"Well, we'll see if we can't borrow something of hers, Mary," Miss Noble said, calmly. "She'll never object."

Humming placidly, she inspected the closet. It offered nothing promising in the way of footgear. A moment, Miss Noble hesitated; then, with a tug at the knobs, she invaded the absent Mrs. Noble's bureau—and in another moment or so she turned with a brilliant smile.

"Here's the very thing," she cried. "Here are those gold silk stockings Sal had last year and the slippers to match. Three-and-a-half, too!"

"You get me that package of absorbent cotton from the medicine cabinet, Mary, and I'll stuff the toes for you. Hurry."

From the huge Thorndyke mansion across the way, music floated to Mary's ear as she watched. She was not weakening. No, by no means was she weakening. But—

"They're splendid—thanks!" she said somewhat faintly, as Helen stood away to examine the feet.

"What?" Miss Noble glanced at her sharply. "They don't hurt, do they?"

"No. I—I was— Nell, do you think Billy'd mind my going, so very much?"

"Oh? This is something we're keeping from Billy, is it?" Peter's sister queried. "I didn't know that."

"It isn't—exactly. But—but—"

"I understand. I'll say nothing, of course," Miss Noble said, somewhat crisply.

Followed a short, uncomfortable pause, wherein the two young women gazed at one another, Miss Noble with just the faintest suggestion of a curve at one corner

of her mouth, Mary flushing slightly and breathing the silence with:

"We're to wait for Peter to take us over?"

"We are not. And—you'll pardon me, Mary?—but it will be just as well if Peter doesn't take us over. Anyway, he said not to wait for him if he wasn't here, and he hasn't been here since I came.

"He must have dressed somewhere else, because he's over there by this time. There's your mask, Mary; it's the biggest one I could find."

She slipped on her own, which was a mere feint at disguise, while Mary's lovely features vanished beneath a covering of black satin that shut them off completely from a curious world. It was as well, too, for the blush on Mary's cheek was deepening.

## CHAPTER X.

### INTO THE ADVENTURE.

**J**UST why must Peter's sister have twitched her mouth in that fashion, as if there were something—well, queer!—about her going like this? Were all men and women in the world like that? Evil of mind, suspicious of the most innocent motives, Billy, Uncle Arthur, Helen, everybody?

Or—and this occurred quite suddenly to Mary as she hurried to the elevator at Helen's side—was it possible that all of them were right and that Mary, the insignificant minority, was all wrong? A nervous little thrill sent her skin to crawling.

Nor did the thrill depart at her first sight of the giant masquerade. A moment she stood motionless when they had attained the floor of the Thorndyke ball-room, listening to Miss Noble's:

"I'll have to desert you now, Mary. I'm on half a dozen of their committees and supposed to be working my head off at this minute. Do you know what Peter's wearing?"

"Armor."

"Oh, you do know? Well, he went by, dancing, just before we came in," said Helen. "Good-by for a little, Mary."

She hurried away, leaving Mary a trifle warmer. Did she dare suggest that Mary was carrying on a deliberate flirtation with her wretched brother? Would she, perchance, confide that suspicion to some dear female friend under pledge of secrecy, thus making certain of its becoming town gossip overnight?

Another, a stronger, nervous thrill came upon Mary. Call all this internal excitement conscience or whatever else she chose, she might as well face the fact: she had done the wrong thing in coming here!

She—yes, she *had* indeed done the wrong thing! That Carmen girl who passed just now was Fay Steers, Billy's first cousin and a cat! If ever she recognized Mary, she'd be as sure to tell as the sun is sure to rise.

Mary's hands turned to ice. She would have to flee. She turned to leave without so much as a single dance—turned and collided with a certain Sir John Falstaff, who begged her pardon in a deep, familiar bass and passed on, while Mary, quite involuntarily, shrank behind a large artificial palm. Because *that* was Billy's Uncle Steve!

What did it mean? Was his whole family here and watching her? Mary swallowed and turned again toward the main entrance.

"You're not dancing, I'm not dancing. May I have this one?" asked an extremely thin pirate, in an extremely familiar high voice.

Behind her mask, Mary could feel her very eyes bulging until they seemed to touch the fabric. It could not be, and still it seemed to be: this was Billy's cousin, Horace. This was Fay's dear brother, like her but infinitely meaner, Horace, who lived to make trouble and gloried in his mission. If ever, in his own fashion, he informed Billy of Mary's presence here—

"I'm not—dancing, thank you," Mary whispered hastily.

"Ah?" chuckled Horace, and continued his curious examination of her. "Do you mind chatting a while, in that cute little whisper of yours?"

"My—partner—in this—"

"Until he turns up," said Horace, easily; and in the very pursing of his lips one saw that there was much about Mary that puz-

zled him. "Do you know," said he, "you're just the fifth girl in this whole crew that I haven't identified at the first good look?"

"Oh?" said Mary, in a strange little cackle that had sought to be a playful giggle.

She moved away and Horace moved with her, staring quite fixedly at her. It was not a bit beyond him, either, to twitch off her mask and— Mary's thoughts raced suddenly, like a machine gone mad! If he did recognize her, if Helen talked, if any one of a dozen people had seen her go to Peter's flat, if the whole mass of false evidence came to Billy, after her own promise that she would do nothing like this, what would Billy do?

Why, unless that wicked eye of his, yesterday, had altogether belied the savage strain somewhere within, it meant that Billy would simply cast her off, it meant the end of all their happiness, of Mary's whole life!

She turned quite wildly toward the door. Horace came closer and kept to her side.

"You know," said he, "I enjoy these affairs in my own fashion, and it worries me horribly not to know all the folks before they unmask. Sort of semi-scientific hobby. Now, there's something familiar about your hair—"

There was an odd significance in his odd words. Mary caught it, just as she caught the gleam of the eye behind his mask, and chilled anew.

It was escape or face utter ruin—and she could not escape the eye of Horace. No, even if she attained the door and fled, headlong, into the night, Horace would see her enter the Cypria house, across the way!

And—oh, there was Peter! Mary's heart beat suddenly once more. There he was, armor and all, with a Dresden China maid on his arm. His vizor was pointed this way, too, and Mary waved a sudden, covert hand in his direction, beckoning.

It really seemed that Peter had grown dense, though—or possibly he couldn't see through the wretched tin helmet. At all events, he turned away again and kept on talking to the Dresden China girl.

The musicians began to tune up once more.

"Piffle!" said Horace, impatiently. "I say, if you'll forget that you have a partner and give me this dance, I'll do likewise."

"Oh, no," said Mary, with her ghastly giggle.

"Because I'm going to stick around until I know you," stated William's odd cousin.

However, he did not accompany her this time as she hurried away toward the other side of the room and fifty feet nearer to the apparently absorbed Peter. Neither, by the way, did he speed off in search of his own partner. Gazing after her, Horace sauntered slowly ahead—and even again Mary beckoned to the suit of armor.

The Dresden China maid, as it chanced, was chatting with a medieval minstrel and a Chinese coolie just then. Twice the shining vizor turned from the back of her pretty neck to Mary Emerson, and back again; and then curiosity seemed to overcome the knight's uncertainty and he came toward Mary at last. His helmet poked forward questioningly as he stared down at her.

"Get me out of here!" hissed Mary.

"What?" came thickly from behind the vizor.

"Quick!"

"What's the trouble?" the knight asked mildly.

"Horace—Horace Steers!" said Mary. "He knows me!"

"That's more than I can say!" laughed the knight.

"Don't be absurd!" Mary said angrily. "I tell you—there! He's staring again!"

"Well, if that—er—if Steers has been bothering you, just say the word and I'll go over and brain him with my mailed fist," said the knight, cheerfully. "When a man's fastened into a suit like this, he's full of chivalry, you know, and any little thing he can do to help a lady—"

"I wish you'd stop that nonsense and get me out of here!" said Mary. "Shoo him away or—or so anything you have to do, so that he doesn't see us leaving and doesn't see where we go!"

"Yes? And then?"

"Take me across to your flat!"

The suit of armor straightened up with a jerk and several small metallic creaks.

"Say! What the—" was certainly what seemed to come from somewhere behind the vizor; and then, controlled again, the voice grew rather chilly:

"Well, I don't quite make it, lady, but if what you want is to get out of here without having Steers see you, now's the time. He's dancing with that girl in black and she's keeping him near the band."

"You come with me!" hissed Mary.

For a moment, the knight glanced at the Dresden China maid, who still chatted with the coolie.

"Well—all right!" he said reluctantly.

And they were on the way! Yes, stupid and queer though Peter had grown, peculiar though his voice sounded from behind the vizor, they were walking naturally and easily on their way to the big doors, and Mary breathed again. And the angel in black seemed to be keeping Horace out of sight and still they were on the way! And now—

"Oh!" said the Dresden China maid, appearing before them almost as if by magic.

"Oh!" said the knight, and stopped with a faint rattle.

"You must have forgotten that this was our dance?" the maid suggested, with hideous sweetness, although they had certainly showed no signs of dancing when the music started.

"Yes, I—I—believe I did forget it," the knight stammered.

And the Dresden China maid was waiting to be taken in his arms! His iron hand dropped from Mary.

Through several terrible seconds the knight wavered; then, muttering strangely toward Mary for a moment, he had taken the Dresden China lady and was dancing away with her, while Mary, deserted, panting, stood alone on the floor, eyes blazing after Peter!

Out of the crowd a Beggar Girl hurried to Mary's side with a brisk:

"Are you one of the Motor Corps girls?"

"I—no. Why?" Mary asked faintly.

"Big flood down the valley. The Corps is called out," said the Beggar Maid, and sped along to the next young woman in sight.

And now the knight had all but vanished and—Mary shook herself together suddenly. Really going to pieces like this was ridiculous! Conscience, recent aspersions, the present superabundance of Billy's relatives, all had combined to break down her nerve.

But the keen emergency of the moment had restored at least a part of it; as if a veil had been lifted from her perturbed brain, it came to Mary Emerson that there was no really good reason why she herself, alone and unaided, should not keep straight on, through the door and out of the house and to Peter's flat!

She turned and made swiftly for the entrance. She slowed down. She also stopped. How it had happened, one could not even guess, but there by the door Horace was just surrendering his lady in black to another man, while he himself sauntered toward Mary.

Strange, unwholesome creature that he was, he stopped directly before Mary, grinning.

"You little rascal!" said he. "Why are you running away like that?"

"I—please let me alone!" Mary murmured.

"Well, but—this gathering's all in fun, you know," said Horace, and if his voice was light and apparently astonished it also held a most peculiar threatening note that was not lost upon Mary. "You wouldn't spoil a poor pirate's fun, would you?"

Mary said nothing. Horace's grin grew, twisting his mouth slightly.

"Of course you wouldn't!" pursued the astounding masquerader, who certainly did enjoy these affairs after his own fashion. "And I'm not going to let you get out of here until I know *just* who you are! Really, I'm not! Shall we dance?"

## CHAPTER XI.

### A LADY IN DISTRESS.

"YOU'VE made quite a hit with your little Old-Fashioned Girl friend, haven't you?" inquired Miss Dolly Hayes, as she danced away with her clumsy iron partner.

"Oh—er—yes!" murmured Thomas.

The Dresden China lips curled ominously.

"Yes, so much of a hit that you thought you'd desert me—*me!*—without so much as one word!" they said.

"Why, Dolly, really, I—"

"That's exactly what you did! You slipped away while I talked to Dick Masterson!"

"Yes, you seemed too absorbed—" Thomas essayed.

"Oh, don't try anything so ridiculous as that, please! Who is the young lady?"

"I haven't the slightest idea!"

"May I be credited with just a trace of ordinary intelligence?" Dorothy asked, and if Thomas had been in some doubt as to whether she was really angry, the last vestige of doubt departed.

"Dot, you have more intelligence than any other ten girls I know, taken together," he said readily. "That's why I'm sure—"

"Thank you! Who is she?"

"Dolly, I don't know!"

The music stopped, happily leaving them in a rather secluded corner. The knight slid to a standstill with a certain sag of his boiler-plate shoulders; Miss Hayes's bosom heaved visibly, but the exertion of the dance had nothing to do with the heaving.

"That girl beckoned to you three times!" she observed.

"Twice," Thomas corrected. "I couldn't help that."

"You could have helped leaving me!"

"Of course, Dolly, but she seemed to be in some sort of distress. I think—I think Horace Steers was annoying her."

"Annoying her?"

"Yes. Er—talking to her, or something."

"Why, the poor, delicate little flower!" said Miss Hayes. "At an affair like this, where everybody knows everybody else—where all the old animosities are being buried and everybody's chaffing everybody else! And he really was talking to her and she had to summon her knight to protect her!"

"Not her knight, Dolly. Your knight," Thomas said, quite miserably. "You know that! Don't be so unreasonable!"

Miss Hayes's head went one inch higher and she smiled dangerously.

"Oh, I'm that, too, am I?" she said. "Just let me tell you something, Tom: I *like* to do that sort of thing!"

"Ah—what sort of thing, Dot?"

"Rescuing you from any amateur vamp who happens to fasten her clutches on you. Dragging my dear fiancé away from other women by main force!" Dolly said, hotly.

"Dolly—"

"Where were you taking her?" Miss Hayes hurled at him, and this time fury set her voice to vibrating so terribly that Thomas gulped.

"Why, she—she—that is, she said she wanted me to take her over to the flat and—" he stammered, quite irresponsibly.

"*What did you say?*" his beloved gasped, unbelievably.

"I'm trying to tell you what she said and—"

"Don't try, please! I'm afraid that I don't care to hear that sort of thing!" interrupted Dolly Hayes, and the vibrating quality was gone now and her words clinked like Polar ice. "I—I can't credit my own hearing! I—"

"Dolly, *listen!*" Thomas cried. "You're all wrong! You're making me talk like a lunatic! You—"

"Oh, don't malign yourself!" said Miss Hayes. "Be honest—that's better! Just say that I startled the truth out of you!"

"But it's not the truth!"

"I'm afraid that I can't believe you, even when you talk in that agonized gurgle!" Dolly smiled, quite horribly. "Do you mind—"

"Look, Dolly!" Thomas broke in. "Look at them now! He's talking to her and she's trying to avoid him. There! See for yourself!"

"Well, run to her, and beat him good!"

"I don't want to do that—I'm not going to do that!" Thomas protested. "I'm only trying to show you, Dolly. There—see *that!* She's trying to get away from him and he insists on walking with her!"

Miss Hayes threw back her head and laughed, and if the laugh sounded musical to people a dozen feet away, it held no music for Thomas Henning.

"Try not to burst into tears, at least!" she said. "You'll rust all the inside of your nice armor!"

"Dolly, all I'm trying to do is to show you what's happening and why I went when she beckoned me!" Thomas said, hoarsely, and his own temper took to climbing despite himself. "I don't know the woman! It's nothing to me if he chooses to take her and wring her neck."

"I'm not a cad or a villain and I'm trying to make you see. Use your eyes, Dolly! See her shaking off his hand!"

Miss Hayes glanced across the room and the sneer curled her lips again.

"Yes, I'm using them. I see," she murmured coolly. "Pathetic, isn't it? If I were you, I'd leap across and—" She stiffened suddenly and her voice lowered. "Oh! Here's Harry Foster coming to me!"

"Well, when you've finished the dance—"

"That's what I want to say! Just eliminate me from your card for the rest of the evening, please. I don't care to dance with you!"

"But Dolly—"

"Oh, I couldn't even think of robbing your friend of your society!" said Miss Hayes, and her voice dropped farther, to a terrible hiss. "And as for the rest of it, we'll settle the details later—or my father will settle them for me! Do you hear?"

"I hear, but—"

"Hello, Napoleon!" Miss Hayes said brightly, as the great emperor approached. "I thought you'd forgotten me and gone off to fight another war."

And now she sailed away with him. Now Thomas, the slightly misguided knight, was privileged to stand by himself and reflect that, out of a perfectly blue sky as it were, had come the thunderbolt of their first real quarrel! He gazed blackly after Dolly; he watched her gorgeous smile, which was all for the benefit of Napoleon now.

Doubtless his soul should have shrunk in contrition and humility for the dreadful thing that had happened; yet it failed to shrink one millimeter—which was entirely because Thomas, like many another badly berated man before him, was innocent!

What in thunder was the matter with Dolly, anyway? He had made one ghastly break in that astonishing conversation, of course, but she had goaded him into it. As to the rest of the nonsense—well, what the dickens *was* the matter with Dolly? She knew perfectly well that he wasn't the sort to start stray flirtations of so serious a character as to warrant all that sarcastic bullying.

In fine, what in blazes did she mean by that sort of talk? Was he, Thomas, a slave or a worm, or something of the kind?

The armor rattled restlessly. Later on, as Thomas understood quite well, he would cool down and seek her out and humble himself, he would explain that it was all his own fault and swear that it should never happen again. But he was not in the mood for that sort of stunt at this moment, and it was really just as well that Dorothy had left with the Napoleonic curiosity!

And what about the innocent cause of it all? Thomas's heart grew quite soft toward her, as he squinted through the inadequate slits of his vizor for a sight of the Old-Fashioned Girl in distress.

Ah, there she was, and still trying to avoid Steers. And what marked good taste she had, in trying to avoid him! Because if ever a full-blown bounder had escaped lynching at the hands of a too tolerant community, it was that same Horace Steers! One of the few things that Thomas really regretted about the passing of his boyhood was that with it had passed the chance for the periodical argument with Horace, wherein it had been his tender custom to draw the dark, ready blood from Horace's long and inviting nose.

With a loud clank, Thomas rested his iron hand upon his iron hip-plate and scowled at the affair across the ballroom.

Steers was trying to take her arm now, and, even again, the girl was endeavoring to shake him off. Considerable though the distance, Thomas could see her shrinking visibly and trying to escape; unless Thomas was decidedly in error, the small, trimly built girl was downright scared.

He drew a long, growling breath. The one useless object on earth is the passive

man who stands by and watches, while better men mix in on the side of right and service! Thomas nodded his helmet suddenly and strode straight through the dancing throng, straight across the room!

## CHAPTER XII.

### THE WAY OUT.

NOR had his very first step missed the damsel in distress! She seemed to straighten and to take new courage; eyes directly toward him, even though not so much as her chin was visible, Thomas could sense the light of hope upon her doubtless lovely features. He laughed shortly and savagely inside his helmet, and the laugh echoed with a queer, tinny effect.

"Our dance, I think?" he observed, as he stopped before them with a considerable thud!

"I—yes!" fluttered from behind Mary's mask.

Horace laughed squarely at the helmet, impudently.

"I say, old chap—Jack Stoner, isn't it?—be merciful this time, will you? We've got a wonderful joke here, and if you'll just not claim the lady until—"

Involuntarily, pleadingly, the lady's fittle hand rested upon Thomas's forearm plate. Inside the helmet the snarl was a pleasant outlet to the knight's feelings, as he rattled closer to Horace Steers and said flatly:

"Beat it!"

"Eh?"

"This is a swell social function, but there's a rough guy inside this portable stove who doesn't like your face. You let this lady alone, pup, or I'll accidentally knock you down and roll over you!"

Time and place considered, it was a most remarkable speech. As such it seemed to impress Horace, for he backed away and backed and kept on backing until he collided gently with the wall—yet he did not take his eyes from the pair. The knight laughed in brutal triumph.

"That settles him," he observed. "Now what?"

"Oh, get me out of here! Just get me

out of here!" Mary gasped. "You didn't come back one second too soon. He's almost sure who I am—almost, but not quite. He swears he'll never let me out of here until he's looked under my mask, and he was just going to attempt it when you came!"

"Really?"

"He was! And we'll have to hurry, too. It's long past nine, now, and I mustn't start down for the train one second later than ten—and I have to dress before I start!" Mary cried feverishly. "You know that I can't miss that train!"

"Of course not!" the knight agreed soothingly. "And just what train?"

"Why, the ten twenty-two, of course. What—what is it, Peter? Have you lost your memory, or are you trying to play some wretched joke on me? Why do you act like that?"

"Possibly because I'm not Peter," suggested the knight. "My name happens to be Henning."

"Tommy?"

"The same!"

The old-fashioned girl seemed to reel a trifle, but as quickly she recovered herself and clasped his mailed arm frantically.

"All right! Then I'll have to explain, and you'll have to help me. Peter made me come to this beastly affair, Tommy; his sister helped me dress, over in Peter's flat, and that's where my clothes are now. He was going to take me down to the train to meet Billy, of course, and—"

"Wait a minute!" the knight said hoarsely, apparently unable to drag his gaze from the tiny pink hand upon his arm. "You're Mary?"

"Of course! And Horace will tell Billy that I was here, and Billy 'll be furious, because I promised not to do anything like this! And if Horace ever sees me going into that apartment house over there—and he will see me!—he'll tell Billy that, too, and Billy 'll think—oh, I don't know what he'll think!

"But I know what he'll do! He'll divorce me, Tommy! He will, because—"

"Hush!" said the knight. "You want to get out of here in a hurry, without Steers seeing where you go, is that it?"

"Oh, in such a desperate hurry, Tommy!"

"Well, Mary, you couldn't have put yourself in better hands!" said Thomas, and remembering the violence of his recent trouble with Miss Hayes, the way in which he had recovered his spirits was no less than wonderful. "I'm the fastest thinker in town, my child; watch me work!"

"Steers still has his eye on us? Ah, yes, so he has, and he's going to keep close, and I can't knock him senseless without making a lot of fuss."

"Tom, don't waste time now talking nonsense!" Mary cried bitterly.

"I'm not! This is just a flow of airy chatter which conceals some tremendous mental processes. How about back doors here? He can follow us, can't he? And we couldn't get across the street without passing the front of the house, and he'd probably rush out and follow us. Quite so."

"We'll have to think up something neat and original, then. Just keep on walking along the wall like this, Mary. The fat shepherdess had nailed Horace for a minute, and he's nearly wild. Ah, she's going to keep him for a little while, too, and she has managed to turn his gaze toward her and—hah! That's the stuff! In there, Mary! Quick!"

He gave a push, and Mary passed suddenly through an open doorway, into one of the half-dozen smaller rooms that let into the mighty Thorndyke ballroom.

"Do you know the geography of this house?" Thomas asked. "Well, I do! Right through that door in the corner, Mary. There ought to be a passage; here it is, too. Never mind the dark. Keep going!"

"There! Do you know where we are now? Well, we're in the dinky little conservatory where old man Thorndyke grows his private varieties of palm, and the reason there's no light is that he doesn't want guests dropping in and smashing them!"

Personally, as his helmet turned from side to side, he seemed to have subsided quite contentedly.

"Yes, but how—" the bride began.

• "Be calm, Mary," the knight said odd-

ly. "I'll see you safely out of this if it takes my life. You know how I've always felt about you. Oh, don't misunderstand me; I'm not trying to make love to you—but, just the same, you know perfectly well that I'd put a mortgage on my soul to help you. Er—Mary!"

"Yes?"

"I've just found the way to get you out and make Steers tear away his whole head of hair with rage and unsatisfied curiosity, if you're game to go through with it. How game are you?"

"I'll do anything in the world that will get me to that train and keep this secret!"

Abruptly, Thomas lifted off his helmet and handed it to her; he also reached for the first of his retaining buckles, which was under the arm.

"Glide in behind those palms, Mary, and I'll hand you this hardware piece by piece, as I take it off. Get into it!"

"The—the armor?"

"Oh, it's quite all right!" the disintegrating knight smiled happily, as he tugged off a shoulder piece. "This stuff isn't heavy, and it all goes on with half a dozen straps. It'll never take you five minutes to get it on, and after that I defy anybody in the world to tell who's inside without lifting the visor."

"But—but you?" Mary faltered.

"Oh, I've got on an old pair of black trousers and a soft white shirt," Mr. Henning chuckled. "I'll open the neck of that and tear off part of your mask to make it look different, and tie a handkerchief around my head and pass for a shipwrecked sailor or something. That part's easy. This is a warm night."

Elsewhere in the beautiful home an expensive clock selected this moment to burst into chiming. The tones, long drawn out, ended in a single boom.

"Yes! Yes, Tommy! All right!" Mary gasped, and pushed her way between two giant pots and into the pitch-black recess beyond.

After that came a strange little interval wherein Thomas, chuckling now and then, removed piece after piece of his raiment, while from behind the palms came agitated rustlings and occasionally queer little terri-

fied gasps. One in particular was louder than the rest, and caused Thomas to speak in a sharp undertone:

"What's the trouble, Mary?"

"Nothing, only I can't possibly get this on over—nothing, Tom."

"Having a struggle with that leg rigging? So did I. Can you manage it?"

There was another pause and further rustling.

"It's on—now!" said Mary, with a queer little catch in her voice.

"Fine! How about the mail shirt?"

"Oh, I can just slip into it all—now!" said Mary.

Another minute and the palms rustled again with Mary's passing. Silently, not very steadily, an iron hand passed a large mask to Thomas Henning; and for a moment the recent knight merely stood and vibrated pure delight.

"Mary, this is the best thing I ever pulled," he said modestly, "and you're the gamest little sport in the world!"

"Well, let's not bother with the compliments now. Let's just get out of the house, Tommy!" came shakily from within the helmet. "Whatever are we going to do about my dress?"

"Oh, it may be uncomfortable, with all that stuff outside, but—"

"It isn't, Tommy. It isn't inside the armor," Mary murmured, with some difficulty. "It's lying in a heap there behind the palms, and if any one ever finds it—"

"They never will. I'll bribe one of the maids to get it before I go home to-night," Thomas said briefly, for the subject was slightly embarrassing, as he tore the lower half from Mary's mask and snapped it on his own head. "Can you walk all right? Wonderful! Let's start. Only, Mary, for Heaven's sake, remember one thing!"

"Why—what?"

"*Don't speak!* No matter what happens, don't forget yourself and speak to anybody, Mary. You're all excited, and your voice is pitched away up in G, and the second you talk the beans are spilled! Go ahead—alone!"

"I daren't do that!" Mary gasped.

"You must!" young Mr. Henning snapped. "I'll drift out behind you and

mix into the crowd until they're used to seeing a shipwreck sailor, Mary. You're *me*, now, and I've been wandering around alone.

"We can't afford to attract attention by going out together. I'll join you inside of two minutes and we'll skip; only—start, Mary! Swagger a little. I did."

And now, as it appeared to Thomas, the poor little bride had collected herself at last, for with one great sigh she was moving. He permitted himself another chuckle as he followed, half a dozen paces behind, through the passage, and into the smaller room.

Really—and this without the slightest treason toward the imperious and unreasonable Miss Dolly Hayes—Mary was one of history's greatest little girls! Serving her was a joy. Thomas lurked in the shadows and watched, grinning contentedly, while Mary, with a queer, slightly tottering gait, moved bravely to the ballroom itself—hesitated suddenly—stopped short, apparently rooted in her tracks!

Mary indeed, for no plain reason, seemed to have run down. Young Mr. Henning was about to step forward and wind her up again with a few sharp words when the flutter of a Dresden China costume, just before the armor, gave him pause and caused his heart to thump.

That was Dolly Hayes herself, fast enough. Yes, and she was smiling faintly at the armor, too—she was smiling in a fashion that brought a smothered groan from Thomas, as the prospect of the immediate future flashed upon him. Dolly, in fine, had sought him out to patch up their recent misunderstanding.

"Well?" he heard in Dolly's soft voice. "Say you're sorry!"

### CHAPTER XIII.

TOM SHOULD WORRY—AND DOES!

**I**N the very queerest way, the armor seemed to sag and settle!

How it might appear from the front, Thomas Henning dared not surmise, but from behind, the whole structure appeared to shrink, as if the occupant were collaps-

ing. Nor was something of the kind at all beyond the bounds of probability!

Mary, palpably, was suffering the highest kind of nervous tension just now; young women in that state frequently faint.

So what if the armor should topple over suddenly, landing on the hardwood floor with the crash of a thousand steel rails, drowning even the distant band? What if anything from two dozen to two hundred people should pile in here and raise the helmet to learn just what had happened to the knight?

What if Horace, among them—well, none of it had happened so far, anyway. Thomas, whose throat had grown peculiarly dry, took a grip upon the casing of his doorway and stared fascinatedly.

"Well?" Miss Hayes repeated.

The knight said nothing.

"Oh, don't be absurd and sulk like that!" Dolly pursued, and dimpled very charmingly. "I may be silly, Tommy. I am. But you were downright rude. You know you were."

The knight said nothing, yet the faintest little shudder stirred his armor for a second or so.

"Don't you know it?" Miss Hayes asked wistfully, unbending to a degree which, for her, was downright astonishing.

The knight offered no comment at all. Dolly, after brief hesitation, came closer and laid a hand upon the mailed arm, and Mr. Henning caught her voice more distinctly.

"Tommy, *please* don't sulk. Don't spoil our whole evening, dear. I was hasty and as nasty as I could be. I admit all that. Now I've come to you of my own accord, to tell you that I'm sorry and have you tell me that you're even sorrier!"

The person in armor declined to tell her anything whatsoever. From the person's expressionless iron face emanated that perfect, utter stillness which one finds inside a country tomb.

"And I'm going to forgive you, Tommy, if you'll tell me who that girl was and why you rushed off to her, even the second time!" said Dolly, who really adored her Thomas and seemed bent upon going to the very limit!

The armor maintained the same non-committal silence. In his doorway, Thomas Henning clasped his hands and gritted his teeth. He would rush forward and clasp her in his arms—he would tell her the truth and enlist her aid for Mary.

Or—no, he dare not. Dolly herself was rather explosive this evening, and from certain past remarks she had made, anent Mary and the interest Thomas seemed to feel in Mary—

"I asked you," said Dorothy, "*who* the girl was?"

And even now the silent knight refused to speak! Miss Hayes's pretty shoulders drew up and her lips set peculiarly. It may have been imagination, but even at the distance it seemed to Thomas that he caught the fiery flash of the eye behind the mask.

"Am I being disciplined? Is that it?" she asked ominously.

The knight refused to contradict her.

"Oh! That is it, then? Really, do you know, if I were you, I wouldn't try a trick like that, Tom," the young woman pursued incisively. "I've come a great deal more than half-way to meet you, although I was just a little in the wrong while you were very much in the wrong. But please don't fancy for one instant that my coming gives you any license to try humiliating me or to maintain that august silence until my spirit is thoroughly tamed!"

"It's not that kind of spirit! You speak to me, do you hear? Speak and tell me you're sorry!"

Again her gentle bosom was heaving! In his background, Thomas gulped and clasped his hands once more, imploringly this time, although to save his very life he could not have told just what it was that he desired.

Not that Mary speak, certainly; not, just as certainly, that she maintain the ghastly silence. One or the other of these courses was altogether unavoidable, to be sure; yet either of them meant dire disaster for Thomas Henning!

Why—*why* out of a crowd of hundreds did not one young man appear and insist that Dorothy dance with him? Why did not an earthquake choose this moment to

rattle the building gently and create a diversion? Why—Thomas's knuckles were crackling under the strain; he dropped his hands to his sides and moaned softly and helplessly. After all, the great inspiration of putting Mary into the armor had been his own.

Dorothy was doing her level best in the matter of self-control. Ah, yes, and her lips were shaping for some new and doubtless interesting remark! Thomas held his breath.

"Tom!" said Miss Hayes's sharp, low voice. "Lift that visor and look at me and let me look at you!"

Inside the helmet there was a single, sudden loud puff, like the sound of pent-up steam escaping. The helmet squeaked, too, as if in terror. That was all, but it caused the very blood in Thomas's veins to congeal.

Here, to be sure, was a bright new possibility; unless he overestimated Dolly's capacity for direct action, one of her dainty hands would go up now and push aloft the movable front of the helmet. He set his teeth. The hands merely clenched tightly, as the vivid red of justified anger crept into their owner's cheeks.

"It isn't that I want to admire your beauty, you know," she said dangerously. "It is that I want to be just to you, and be sure. Are you ill or overcome with the heat in there, or something like that?"

The helmet shook swiftly from side to side. One hand rose uncertainly, as if in protest, and dropped again. Dorothy's full lips turned to a straight, white line, and her adorable head came closer to the helmet.

"You may not realize it, you may not believe it," she said, quite thrillingly, "but unless you speak to me this instant, you'll never—never speak to me again in this world!"

Tensely, she waited. Save that it swayed a little, like a bush in a gentle breeze, for all the sign of life or interest that came from the armor, it might have been entirely empty!

"Very well, you have made the choice," Miss Hayes remarked, concluding her monologue—and she turned abruptly and

stepped away, into the happy crowd, out of Thomas Henning's life!

The victim in the far doorway leaned weakly against the casing. It had happened before his very eyes, and with himself as powerless as a man in a trance—but at least it was over. He smiled dizzily for an instant, but the smile ended in a shiver.

Henceforth for an indefinite period, unless he had misjudged Dolly all these years, there would be little in his existence to smile about. There are girls, perhaps, who can be affronted quite safely. Dolly was not of these, and—Thomas shivered again.

Peter, whatever his mysterious subsequent motive in himself engineering Mary to this spot, had been right: it was better to beware of this particular bride!

Still, it was Mary. Thomas softened a little and looked toward her. She would move into the crowd now, and presently, in her smiles of gratitude, he might glean some meager payment. And—well, what was the matter with Mary now? The knightly nerve seemed to have failed, after all; the armor had faced about and was scraping back toward him.

"Tommy!" came brokenly from within the helmet. "Did you hear?"

"Oh, yes, I heard," Thomas said grimly.

"I—I'm so sorry!"

"It was just one of those things that happen, Mary," young Mr. Henning replied as lightly as might be. "It'll have to be patched up later, of course. You'd better get out and mix with the crowd, now."

"After that?" Mary gasped. "What, the same thing might happen again!"

"It will not, my child," sighed Thomas. "I wasn't engaged to more than one girl. Go ahead. Time is getting short."

Risk notwithstanding, the mailed hand pushed up the visor and Mary gazed forth. Her face was white and stricken and frightened, yet there was even more in its expression. Although such a thing approached impossibility, it almost seemed that an accusing light flickered in Mary's eye.

"I can't!" she said. "Not this way!"

"What way?"

"In this horrible tin can, Tommy! I—

I'm afraid! I can't see, and I can hardly walk, and I'm afraid of falling over somebody and having the whole thing come to pieces!"

"It can't."

"It can! It's frightfully loose in spots," Mary stated agitatedly. "It—of course it was a lovely idea of yours, Tommy, and I'm ever so grateful, but it's so—so crazy and impossible. I can't go on with it!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE WARRIOR BOLD.

ALTHOUGH he smiled, Thomas breathed quite deeply.

"Well, just what else would you like to do, Mary?" he asked.

"Go back there and change to my dress again, of course. And then, when we come out, if Horace is near, you'll have to take him bodily—playfully, you know—and just push him along somewhere and keep him there. That's what we should have done in the first place."

She waited, impatiently. Thomas favored her with a strained smile.

"Very well, Mary," he muttered. "I suppose we can manage it. Let's—"

And here he stopped, gazing toward the doorway; and he smiled suddenly and flipped down the visor! Even his tone had changed altogether as he said: "Down with the mask, Sam! Don't give yourself away!"

"What do you mean?" Mary gasped.

"I think the large gentleman just entering, more or less disguised as a buccaneer, is Mr. Thorndyke himself!" Thomas said loudly.

Just behind the armor a fat chuckle sounded, as the lord of the mansion himself came to a standstill, and after the chuckle a yawn and:

"Good evening, gentlemen. Ho—hum! Is this thing a frightful bore or am I getting old?"

Thomas laughed his gay deprecation.

"Not the latter, certainly. And as for the evening, it's the most wonderful one Braydon has ever seen!" said he.

"It is? Everybody happy, eh? The

love feast's going to be a big thing for the town, anyway. Astonishing that a community like this should have split up and spent so much energy cutting throats that might have been used in developing, isn't it?" the host of the evening mused amiably. "There's a big boom coming hereabouts!"

Far away in the house the clock took to chiming again. The armor clattered faintly and stood erect. Mr. Thorndyke chuckled again.

"Gad! That's quite a get-up, isn't it?" he said, and looked it over curiously as he swung his cutlas. "I didn't know there was a thing like that in town. What is it? Papier-mâché?"

He drew the cutlas, too, and with the handle, which must have weighed two pounds, he rapped the helmet smartly, bringing forth an astonishingly sonorous clang!

"Iron, eh?" he pursued. "Well, upon my word! I—oh, see here! I'm sorry!" he cried suddenly, for the armored one's knees gave way abruptly—seemed about to give altogether—straightened up again with a mighty, swaying effort! "I had no idea the thing would ring like that! I must have deafened you, and—I say, I'm most infernally sorry!"

"Oh, that's all right!" Thomas said blithely, as he caught the trembling mailed arm and steadied it. "He likes it. Sam's a little bit green to the knight business, and he wants to get used to those things. We're just on our way to—"

"Well, before you go, come in here with me," said the perturbed buccaneer. "Come!"

"Come where?" escaped Thomas.

"My little private conservatory. That's where I was headed, you know; that's my one refuge on earth when I want a quiet hour or two," Thorndyke pursued, and laid a kindly and apologetic hand upon a shining shoulder-plate. "I have a very special and attractive way—these days—of making amends for a fool trick like that, Mr. Whoever-you-are-in-there!"

"The architect gave us about ten thousand feet of floor space in the cellar, and prohibition isn't due in this house for some-

thing like eighty years. Come along, both of you."

"Well, Sam and I were just—"

"Oh, postpone it, whatever it was!" Mr. Thorndyke laughed. "Come and have a cigar, at least."

"We—can't! We're sorry, but we can't, really," Thomas said, with a slight tightening in his throat. "You're going to smoke—in there?"

"It doesn't injure the palms," their owner said blandly.

"I know, but—I meant, you'll be in there for some time?" Thomas persisted, and his smile was a queer thing to see.

"Oh, that's it?" the owner of the house laughed. "Yes, I shall be in there for some time; slip in whenever you're ready, gentlemen. I'm past this sustained gaiety thing, I'm afraid."

"You'll find me in the little conservatory for the next two hours at least. Nothing you—er—care to come in for now?" he chuckled in conclusion.

"Nothing!" Thomas lied thickly.

Heavily, rather wearily, the buccaneer moved away, across the room and through the farther door, which he closed carefully after him. Thomas shook the swaying armor lightly.

"Are you all right, Mary?" he whispered.

"Are you—speaking?" came faintly from the helmet. "I'm nearly deaf!"

"I know. It—it was unfortunate," Thomas muttered.

"Unfortunate!" echoed the helmet, and seemed to gather force. "It was beastly! Why did you let him do that?"

"How—how could I know—"

"You must have seen what he was going to do!" Mary said warmly. "I'll never hear properly again! Well? Did he really go in there?"

"He really did, Mary!"

"Then how can we get my dress?"

"We can't!"

"We'll have to! *You'll have to!*" Mary cried, and pushed up her visor with sudden energy. "You, and you alone, got me into this!"

"Mary—"

"Go in there and make him come out!"

"I'll wait here and slip in when you've passed!"

"Mary, it couldn't be done without a long argument, which would take time, or a brilliant idea of some kind—and I don't seem strong on brilliant ideas this evening," Thomas said firmly. "Did you hear that clock strike quarter of ten?"

"Yes! What time is it now?"

"It must be almost ten o'clock! If you want to make that train, Mary, shut the lid of that infernal helmet and let's chance going out together. If Steers gets in our path, Heaven help him. Shall we start?"

He waited with commendable patience, while the beautiful eyes within the iron hat snapped at him—winked more rapidly and grew moist.

"I don't mean to be cross, but that was horrible!" said Mary. "Isn't there *any* way of getting that dress and getting me out of this?"

"If there was, I'd cheerfully break my neck to find it for you, Mary. There isn't—if you're going to make that ten twenty-two!"

The vizor dropped of its own accord. From the depths of the helmet issued a strange, catching little sob.

"All right, but—Tommy!"

"Yes?"

"You won't let any one else hit me?" Mary asked shakily, and it was probably the oddest request of her life.

"When they do, you'll know that I'm dead!" stated young Mr. Henning. "Shall we start?"

The helmet nodded slightly. He tucked a reassuring hand under the mailed arm and led its owner to the door, and there he paused for a moment and scanned the ball-room.

They were not dancing just now, and neither Horace Steers nor Dolly was in sight. People chatted in little knots and at a distance. Indeed, save for the Jester and the Chinese coolie over there, and the half-dozen gay young men who insisted upon being beaten by the Jester's swinging bladder, the way to the entrance was pleasantly clear.

Thomas even permitted himself a smile.

"I think we can do it nicely," he mur-

mured to the helmet. "We'll just stroll along, you know. Now!"

He gave a squeeze of the reassuring hand and stepped out, with the knight dragging oddly beside him. Nonchalantly, carelessly went Thomas, chatting in an undertone about nothing under the sun and—the Chinese coolie pointed suddenly and cried:

"There's the husky old knight! There's the boy we've been looking for!"

Young Mr. Henning's heart paused; for an instant he meditated headlong flight with Mary—but while this would have been feasible enough with a hand-truck upon which to load Mary and her present evening-gown, it was out of the question on foot. Himself a decidedly powerful young man, it had been Thomas's impression that the garment was almost feather-like; on Mary it seemed to weigh about one ton!

Young Mr. Henning, then, turned slightly dazed and dizzy. Even as these few thoughts had raced through his head, the group had surrounded them, surging and pushing and all abubble with life and the spirit of the occasion. And it was the coolie who laid a heavy, fraternal hand upon Mary's shoulder-plate and said:

"What ho, knight! We need you in our business!"

"Well—" Thomas essayed.

"This is a great ball, but it lacks speed in the intermissions, King Arthur," the Jester explained cheerily. "We're the special committee on putting pep into intermissions, just organized, and we're going to hold a meeting of the prize costumes and give a five-minute march of 'em!"

"And the first award's a soldering kit, knight—handiest thing you ever saw for a suit like that!" added the genial coolie. "Right up this way with the rest of us, please!"

He seized the armor on one side. A giant Zulu seized it upon the other. The armor rattled and reeled.

"Wait a minute!" Thomas said hoarsely. "That fellow—"

"Who's the plain person in the simple white shirt?" the coolie inquired, pausing only a second. "What do you represent? The iceman?"

"A—what? A shipwrecked sailor!" Thomas sought to grin. "But—"

"Back to your desert island, then, before the wheels of joy run over you—because we haven't all night for this stunt!" cried the happy coolie. "Beat him to death, Jester, and drop him overboard!"

"We want to stage this big special feature before they get desperate and take to dancing again. What's the matter with the walk, knight? Loose rivet sticking in your foot? Make it a little snappier, will you. Keep step with me and give it some steam! Here comes the rest of the gang."

The crowd had swelled to two dozen, now, and they were moving off, with Mary in the very center. A policeman swung his light club suddenly.

"An impression," he proclaimed, "of a

Japanese yellow mandarin announcing dinner!"

The wretched stick crashed down upon the knight's wide back-plate, which did bear a certain resemblance to a dinner-gong. The clang rang out, to raise a new chorus of delight and a renewed stirring as they strode ahead.

The club beat on—a Cavalier's light sword came down upon the helmet, producing an even more pleasing note—the Jester discovered, too, that even his inflated bladder would bring forth sound, and went to work with a will.

Still young Mr. Henning did not move. His legs were stone; his muscles seemed to have frozen. They did not understand, but he did; they were murdering Mary now!

**This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**

Action!  
by



Horatio Winslow

"AT him again! Feint with your left! Cross with your right!" Promptly the boy obeyed, carrying the battle to his opponent.

Overhead the great cluster of lights poured a glaring swelter of radiance that brought out every dip and swelling of the fighters' muscles. The heat from the lamps had become an oven blast, with its parching breath beating down, not only upon the seminude figures in the ring, but also upon the spectators at the reporters' shelf and the seconds at the corner-posts.

"Let him rush you! Let him fight him-

self out!" Crisp, commanding, the voice rose clearly above the scrape of rosined soles on the padded canvas.

The momentary attack ended, the boy allowed himself to be made the target of a flight of blows, all of which landed, however, on carefully guarding gloves.

"Wait for him! Circle to the left! You know you've got him if you wait!"

His heavier opponent, teeth set, bored in with sledge-hammer strokes.

"Clinch!" The order could not be disobeyed; the voice carried authority in its very timbre.

There was no delay in the boy's response. Like an automaton, his arms flung out; and, cleverly ducking a right hook, he pinioned the other's arms.

"Lean on him! Don't let him lean on you! That's good!"

The faces of the spectators displayed an interest that was clearly not feigned.

"Break!"

With a sudden effort of the larger fighter, the clinch ended, and the other boy danced away to his corner.

"Ten seconds left, Jimmy! Let him have it! Fast!"

Again the boy bored in, shooting lefts and rights, not wildly, but with the skill born of aptitude and endeavor.

From the ringside seats on the left a man in a gray suit half rose, as if to cheer, and then dropped back again.

"Mix it harder!" There was no disobeying the bidding of that voice.

The boy swung his right, landing solidly, in spite of the upraised shoulder, on the other's cheek. His heavier opponent staggered; then, dropping his head, rushed doggedly forward as the gong clanged.

While the seconds rushed to their work, the instructions continued, sharply, compellingly: "Look out for that chair! Keep those fans waving! Sponge out his mouth, Murphy!"

As the spectators settled in their chairs, a confused murmur rose from the ringside, mingled with scattering applause. It was exactly as though this were a real glove battle.

"Never mind the talking!" It was the vibrant voice again. "Whisper what you have to say! They've got to hear me!"

Back-stage an idle camera man nodded approvingly.

"I'll say Lawrence Briscoe is staging a regular fight. It may be 'movie stuff,' but he hasn't missed a detail of the real thing."

His companion agreed. "It's just a bit, but that's Briscoe's way. Does a thing perfectly, or doesn't do it at all. He's worth every cent the Beautycraft Film Company pays him."

"You bet he is," said the cynical cameraman. "If he wasn't, he wouldn't be here. There's no sentiment in this outfit. Jump-

ing cranberries! how'd you like to be working under that light inferno?"

From his platform, megaphone to mouth, Director Briscoe continued to snap out his crisp orders.

"Remember, this is the last round. Vance, it's the battle of your soul they're fighting in that ring; show it. When Jimmy is down, you stand up in your ringside seat—all the way, and keep standing up till the fight ends. Remember, Jimmy, that knockdown comes when you are within five feet of Vance. Then follow everything I say. Peterson, those lights aren't loose, are they? All right. Ready? Action! Camera!"

*Clang!*

Through the ropes the seconds scrambled, lugging with them their paraphernalia.

"Meet him, Jimmy! Beat him to the middle of the ring! You're going to finish him this time!"

Leaning forward, the spectators stiffened for the dramatic finish. It was prearranged; they knew exactly how it was coming out; yet, in spite of this fact, they could not help paying an unconscious tribute to the work of the director.

"Stand up to him, Jimmy! You know you're going to win! Vance, remember this fight is the turning point in your life. It's symbolic. If Jimmy isn't licked, you're not licked. If he wins, you're going up against your own big odds with inspired courage. Show it—show it with your expression, your shoulders, your hands, your whole taut body!"

Slamming and battering, the two fighters stood toe to toe. The sweat generated by the scorching lights overhead rolled from their sleek bodies. The heavier opponent was gasping.

"Clinch again!" Briscoe's curt order crackled like a wireless spark. His voice had the quality of the dynamo that gave energy to the lights.

"Break them, referee! Back, Jimmy! You're half out of your chair, Vance! No, a little higher!"

Throwing his megaphone behind him, the director jumped lightly from the platform and ran down the aisle, just out of range of the camera.

"You're watching, Vance! You're fighting his fight in spirit! That's it!"

The fighters were exchanging short-range punches.

"That's the system! He's playing groggy, Jimmy, but you don't know it! You see an opening! In you go! Not too much guard!"

Vance was coming to his feet.

"Swing with your right! Again! Again! Back a step! Study him! Now go in!"

So perfectly did they follow that the boxers might have been obeying the pull of invisible strings.

"Ready for the knockdown! Take a right on the jaw, Jimmy! Now for—look out, everybody! Back! Back!"

Abruptly the acted drama halted. Stalking hard on its heels came reality; grim, relentless tragedy. The lights flickered. A sound like that of an avalanche ground and screeched. Then something gigantic, ablaze like a meteor, crashed to the floor. Followed the pall of absolute blackness.

It was the great lamp cluster overhead, hood and reflector and all, that had torn loose and fallen. From the babel of voices in the ensuing darkness came screams of pain and terror, broken by frantic appeals for lights—lights—

When the secondary side electrics had been switched on, they revealed a mass of bloody, scrambling men. Strangely enough, perhaps due to the timely warning, neither of the fighters had been injured, although splinters of glass and wood and more devastating chunks of metal had scattered over the entire stage.

Jimmy Wing, gloves hanging at his sides, stared at the aisles where the director had been standing before the accident.

"Mr. Briscoe!" he shouted. "Oh, Mr. Briscoe!"

There was no answer. Face downward on the wooden floor, hands limp and open, head bleeding, the director lay motionless.

## II.

THERE was a stir and bustle in the little training-camp which was unusual at that late hour of the morning. As a matter of fact, it might be termed a training-camp

only by courtesy; for to the casual passer-by it seemed, except for a punching-bag under an oak-tree and two sets of boxing-gloves on a bench, no more than the usual summer cottage north of Milwaukee, along the Port Washington road that borders the lake.

"Come on, Larry. Time to start." His face flushed with the coloring of perfect condition, his trim, muscular body revealing itself despite the well-worn, baggy clothes, Jimmy Wing stepped forth into the sunshine.

Outside he turned and waited.

Through the doorway, hesitating a little as if not sure of his footing, came a man whose age appeared as indefinite as his faltering movements. His body was slightly stooped; his hands moved restlessly, continually exploring. Though the hair on the top of his head was brown, along the sides it had begun to silver.

"Jimmy, I can't find my knife." The voice was querulous, with a curious flat intonation.

"Never mind! We'll buy you a new knife, Larry, down at the store. Won't that be fine? Come on, now; hop into the 'fivver.'"

The older man fumbled his way into the seat of the car. "A new knife, Jimmy?"

"Surest thing you know! A brand new knife, with three blades." Jimmy bent to crank the engine. "Just as soon as we come from the doctor's."

"Seems to me, Jimmy, I was at the doctor's once."

"Sure you were. Out in Los, Larry. But this is a different doctor. After we see him, I'll get you a new knife and maybe some sweet chocolate."

"Sweet chocolate!" There was no mistaking the rapturous expression on the man's face. "That will be fine, Jimmy. Let's hurry to the doctor's right away."

It was a pleasant drive over parked roads into the city of Milwaukee, and then along smooth, shaded pavements to the office in the big down-town building. The appointment had been made by telephone; there was no delay in seeing the doctor.

"I feel sort of afraid, Jimmy."

"Well, you take hold of my hand," said

the fighter comfortingly, "and it 'll be all right."

From his desk chair Dr. Ballard surveyed the pair curiously.

"Your letter and our telephone conversation have made the case fairly clear to me," he began. "But perhaps you can give me a few more details."

Jimmy leaned forward. "I'll tell you everything I know."

"As I understand it, he was hit on the head during the staging of a moving-picture in Los Angeles nearly a year ago. He was a director, I think you told me?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy proudly, "and he was some director! He put on 'Soldier Stuff' and 'The Valley of Broken Dreams.' Maybe you saw them on the screen?"

The surgeon's eyes opened. Among his few dissipations was a taste for the movies. "You say this man directed 'The Valley of Broken Dreams'? You don't mean he is—Bristol, or—"

"Briscoe; yes, sir; this is Lawrence Briscoe."

The man they were discussing interrupted. "Not Briscoe—that's what Jimmy calls me sometimes. But I ain't Mr. Briscoe; I'm just Larry. And Jimmy is going to give me a new knife after I see the doctor. He said so."

"H-m! Pity! Pretty much this way ever since?"

Jimmy Wing coughed apologetically. "No, sir; worse once. When he first came out of the hospital in Los Angeles, he was like a baby. It seemed as if he had forgotten everything. He couldn't walk decent, and he couldn't talk much of any. I've learned him everything he knows. But before that," Jimmy thrust forward his head emphatically, "before that Mr. Briscoe was the best educated man you ever saw. Yes, sir, and the finest!"

The surgeon studied the patient through his rimless spectacles.

"Did they operate on him?"

"No, sir; they said they didn't believe that it would do any good, and that it might prove fatal."

"You understand," said the surgeon slowly, "that a case of this character is complicated. It is possible that an opera-

tion may relieve some bone pressure and restore his normal brain action. There are records of similar cases cured by shock, either mental or physical, but these instances are more or less accidental. Now, I shall be glad to operate, but it will be expensive, and I cannot guarantee the result."

"I understand," nodded Jimmy, feeling reassuringly in his pockets, "but I'm willing to pay every cent it costs—and hope it will cure him! Doc, I tell you, you don't understand how I feel about him. I was just fifteen, and living in the streets, when he picked me up and set me on my feet. He took care of me, doc, and taught me, and gave me a job, and watched over me for three years. Why, I—I might have been his kid brother, the way he looked out for me. And when I began to do a little of this four-round fighting, amateur bouts out in Los Angeles, you know, he didn't care. He used to go every time and holler for me."

"Yes?" encouraged the surgeon.

"And all the time he kept me kind of helping him while he was directing, and maybe letting me play bits now and then, and all that. And he always wanted to send me away to school, but I wouldn't go. I wanted to stay with him."

Jimmy paused, lost in his memories.

"But I wasn't the only one. Why, doc, he just spent his money right and left helping his friends; and you know what Los Angeles is—jammed with people who expected to make fortunes in the movie game and went broke. So when he got through with the hospital, he didn't have a cent, nor nobody to offer him a bed—and him like a child! And I—I took care of him, doc, because I wanted to; and I took care of him ever since. He ain't had a bad time, have you, Larry?"

"I have a good time, Jimmy; and I help you, don't I?"

"Sure you do. He's learning every day, like a kid that's just growing up. He can build fires and sweep, and he's learning to cook a little. I bought him a knife about a month ago, and he's getting to be a real good whittler."

The afflicted man raised a protesting hand. "You said you'd get me a new knife, Jimmy."

"And I will, too, Larry." He turned to the surgeon. "So that's how it stands, doc. We had some hard rows to hoe at first, but I'm making money now, and pretty soon I think I'll be in line for a fight with the middleweight champion. Thursday night I take on Chick Robbins at the Auditorium—five hundred for that; and, doc, if you can do anything for *him* I'll be glad to pay you everything I earn for a year; anything to bring back his full mental power."

"We'll try the operation," said the surgeon. His eyes were shining in a wholly unprofessional manner. "And, Mr. Wing, I'll make the cost as light as I can. If he goes into the hospital now, we should be able to determine by Wednesday whether or not the operation is a success." He stood up and shook hands with Jimmy Wing.

"You promised you'd get me a knife, Jimmy." The man's voice quavered plaintively.

"I'll get you the finest knife in the store, Larry; yes, and some sweet chocolate, too, and anything else you want."

It was ten o'clock Wednesday morning when Jimmy Wing and Dr. Ballard stood by the bedside of the man who had become a child.

"I'm afraid there is no use hoping, Mr. Wing," confessed the surgeon. "He has come through the operation splendidly. There is no doubt about his living, but I'm afraid his mind is just what it was." He shook his head. "You speak to him."

Half fearfully, Jimmy bent over the bandaged convalescent.

"Mr. Briscoe! Mr. Briscoe! It's me—Jimmy, Mr. Briscoe."

A faint, fretful voice answered. "Why do you keep calling me Mr. Briscoe? I ain't Mr. Briscoe. I'm just Larry. And, Jimmy, you promised you'd get me a new knife."

### III.

DOWN, down, pitilessly down, the hot sun beat on the bodies of the half-naked men in the ring. They might have been stokers under the flare of boiler fires. But the sun's rays were brighter than any red glow of any furnace. They brought out every dip and swelling of the fighters' mus-

cles, and shot the dripping sweat with radiant reflections.

From his seat near the ringside, Dr. Ballard studied the whole scene before him with curious eyes, not omitting the spectators themselves. Except for an amateur bout or two at the Milwaukee Athletic Club, the surgeon had witnessed no boxing shows; and yet here he was, on a vacation junketing, half by chance, half by inclination, in the new Tia Juana amphitheater, watching a battle for the middleweight championship of the world.

Fat Americans, slim Americans, respectable Americans, others not so respectable, Mexicans, a scattering of women, all went to fill the vast arena with its spectacle of latter-day gladiators.

"Attaboy, Jimmy!"

It was one of the normally quiet and everyday Americans, a butcher perhaps, or the proprietor of a placid restaurant, who let out the whoop. Now, as Dr. Ballard saw, the quiet and everyday American had altogether forgotten his inhibitions and seemed on the point of letting his enthusiasm carry him out of his silk shirt. The incident interested and amused the specialist in brain diseases.

"Fight him! Fight him, Jimmy!" The stout gentleman turned. "Ain't that Jimmy Wing a wonder! Never even been knocked down. I tell you, we got a new champ to-day. Attaboy, Jimmy! Don't let him set!"

There was no doubt where the sympathies of the crowd lay. "Heeler" Kull was the present champion, but he was far from popular. His "money-first, safety-next, fair-play-last" tactics had brought him to the top of the heap, but they had not carried him into public favor. Jimmy Wing was the crowd's man. And even Dr. Ballard felt in himself the stirrings of enthusiasm. He, too, wanted Jimmy to win.

Following the unsuccessful operation, he had acquired a habit of reading the sport-pages of the daily papers, wherein Jimmy Wing's sensational rise to the logical contender for the middleweight crown had been spasmodically featured. In fact, it was just possible, Dr. Ballard admitted to himself, that he had taken his yearly vacation at

this time and place that he might see the very thing he was now witnessing.

*Spat! Clutter! Biff! Clinch!*

The eighth round was unfolding with plenty of action. So far Jimmy had played on the defensive, but now he was beginning to fight back, to give as much as he took. Meanwhile Heeler Kull, in spite of elbows and butting proclivities, was steadily losing his early fire of assault.

"Lick him, Jimmy!"

Dr. Bullard sat up in his seat quite as though he had been shocked by an errant current of electricity. There was no mistaking that voice. Vibrant, with a suggestion of hidden power, yet quavering and uncertain, it could belong to nobody save the man upon whom he had operated. It was Briscoe. Now, for the first time, he saw him.

There had been no change in the man's appearance, if one excepted the more costly clothing he wore. He was seated between two of the seconds back of Jimmy's corner, one of them a beefy heavyweight who from time to time laid a gentle but firm restraining hand on the man's shoulder.

"Jimmy can lick him!"

In a sudden lull of the fight, the voice pierced through the arena.

"Jimmy can lick him!" mocked a boy from the back seats.

The man stood up, facing about angrily.

"Jimmy can lick him!" he shouted in his thin, flat voice. "And he promised me a new knife if he licks him."

The roar which greeted this announcement died into an animal growl as the attention of the crowd shifted from the speaker to the little drama which was being enacted in the ring.

Toe to toe the fighters were standing, trading punches as if this round were to be the last. And Heeler Kull, his craftiness beaten down by honest punches, was giving way before the volleying fists.

"Lick him, Jimmy!"

The exhortation was lost in the uproar.

A right hook crossed to Heeler Kull's chin, and the crowd rocked with primitive lust.

"Knock him out! Kill him! Knock-out! Knockout!"

To his own surprise, the surgeon found himself on his feet with the rest of the crowd, loosing his voice in an incoherent roar of encouragement.

Heeler Kull staggered back, dropping his guard. What happened then came so quickly that Dr. Ballard barely sensed the quick turn. Jimmy Wing, betrayed by the feigned grogginess of his opponent, charged forward, met a thudding, gloved fist, suddenly stumbled, and with unhinged knees sank to the canvas.

Heeler Kull's craftiness had stood the champion in good stead. He had summoned all his strength in one right chop to the jaw, and it had landed flush.

Mouth open, more stunned than he cared to admit to himself, Dr. Ballard watched the referee swing between the fallen fighter and his menacing foe, and begin the count.

"One!" The right arm lifted and fell.

Heeler Kull, leering at the lump of quivering flesh on the canvas, stepped back only the required distance.

Something was happening in Jimmy's corner. The surgeon could see the seconds struggling with the man whose brain had fogged. "Keep down, Larry! Keep out of the ring!"

"I am not going into the ring!"

At the sound Dr. Ballard thrilled. It was the voice he had heard above the shouting; and yet it was not the same voice. It had become clear, strong, vibrant.

"Two!" counted the referee.

Jimmy Wing lay where he had fallen, with the heaving of his stomach the only mark of life.

"All over!" groaned the fat man.

"Three!" tolled the referee, unconsciously slowing the count.

Then it happened.

The man whom Jimmy had befriended and led by the hand was standing at the corner, his face thrust forward between the platform and the bottom rope.

"Jimmy! Do you hear me? It's Briscoe! Ready!"

#### IV.

It was good to be resting, Jimmy told himself dreamily. He was weary, unutterably weary. His legs were like soft clay;

his arms ached; a pain flooded his head, shutting off sight and hearing and all control of muscles. If he could just lie there forever—

"Ready!"

The sharp command pierced the shroud of his paralysis, snapping the cords that seemed to bind him. It was the voice of Director Briscoe; it must be obeyed instantly. He groaned, but there was no thought of revolt. From above him, apparently miles and miles away, he caught the single word: "Four!"

"Action!"

The boy tensed his muscles expectantly. He heard a faint "Five!"

"Turn over!"

Jimmy drew up his legs experimentally. He pawed with one glove, rasping against the rosin on the canvas. "Six!"

"Turn over!" snapped the voice of Director Briscoe again.

This time he managed it, falling flat on his stomach.

"Get up on your hands and knees!"

The crisp order brooked no delay.

He raised himself on all fours, swaying a little from side to side. Somebody hissed "Seven!" in his ear. He could hear the booming of the crowd now, mad with excitement, and the sudden hush as his director spat out the next command:

"Stand up!"

He hinged one leg and put his foot flatly against the canvas. The referee counted "Eight!"

"Up!" shouted Briscoe. "Come up with a leap!"

It seemed impossible. If anybody else in the world had asked him to do it he would have turned a deaf ear. But there was no combatting the man who had instilled in him instant compliance with his directions. Awkward, as a fallen horse gets to its feet with a ludicrous scramble, Jimmy came to a standing position, with the echo of a "Nine!" ringing in his ears.

The arena volleyed with thunderous cheers that cut into Jimmy's ear-drums like the rat-a-tat of stinging blows. A blurred form in front of him, that must have been the referee, stepped back, out of the picture, and left another figure facing him.

Jimmy knew instinctively that this advancing devil, eyes blazing, fists poised, must be Heeler Kull. He shrank back, afraid, bewildered, beaten before he was hit. Some part of him seemed to have taken wings and flown. What it was—

"Clinch!" crackled Director Briscoe's voice; and Jimmy knew the missing organ was his again. It was the brain that had put him on his feet, the mind that had conquered matter, the directing power of the man who had trained him in the moving-picture game.

As he had learned to do in the years after Briscoe had befriended him, Jimmy obeyed instantly. Lunging forward, he wrapped his long arms about the body of Heeler Kull.

Heeler struggled desperately to fling him off. The referee tried valiantly to pry him loose. But they were only acting, of course. From his corner, again and again, he heard the compelling voice: "Hold! Hold! Hold tight, Jimmy!"

And he held!

By this time, too, his brain was clearing rapidly. He began to wake to the situation. Muscles that had been limp and useless were tensing for what was to come. If Briscoe would only run off the scene without halt or accident, he would do his part.

"Over this way!" snapped the director. Jimmy wrestled Heeler Kull toward the voice. "Your back to me now! That's right! Ready—break and step back!"

Jimmy unwrapped his arms with a jerk. At the same moment he leaped away from the furious Heeler Kull.

But the other fighter had no intention of seeing certain victory wrenched from him this way. Slowly, cautiously, measuring the wavering Jimmy for the blow, he started a mighty right swing for the jaw.

"Duck!" warned Director Briscoe. The sharp commanding accent crackled like a wireless spark.

Jimmy ducked. A clenched glove whistled over his head. He wanted to step in with a straight-arm jolt as the force of the swing left Heeler Kull wide open; but he dared not take the initiative. Perhaps the scenario called for something else. He was still confused and slow-minded; he

knew only that he must react unhesitatingly to every spoken wish of Director Briscoe.

Heeler Kull set himself a second time. Purring into Jimmy's ear from behind, low but vibrantly distinct, Briscoe gave him the situation, precisely as he had done so often in the days when the Beautycraft cameraman was shooting a picture.

• *"He'll try the same thing again, Jimmy. Take the blow on your left arm, holding it high and crouching as it comes. Then up-percut with your right to the jaw—hard!"*

The voice was too low for Heeler Kull to follow. It is doubtful, indeed, if he could have sensed shouted directions; for he was deaf now to every sound save the one thudding blow that was to flatten Jimmy Wing. Stealing forward toward the boy before him, he put shoulder and body into one crushing swing.

Jimmy threw up his left arm as guard, timing it nicely. The blow landed there and spent itself; the glove hung fast to the reddening flesh for a moment, while Heeler Kull's body pivoted half around.

*"Now!"* spat Director Briscoe.

Putting into the uppercut every ounce of his gathering strength, Jimmy shot his right to the other's chin. Heeler Kull, hurt and bewildered, lurched back on his heels.

*"Rush him!"* shouted Briscoe's dynamic voice. *"Don't pull your punches! Everything you've got, Jimmy! Into him—hard! Hard! Hard!"*

Before the dazed Heeler could set, Jimmy was all over him, slamming in his blows, battering, tearing, ripping, mauling, in a mad variety of hooks jabs, jolts swings, and uppercuts. Heeler Kull fought back wildly, but there was no covering nor countering that could ward off or stop this sudden avalanche of flying gloves. He was being beaten back and down. He lunged forward to clinch, only to meet a terrific punch flush on the neck, where it landed just below the jaw-bone.

Jimmy felt Heeler's arms clutch him with a grip like death. He halted his furious onslaught, waiting for Briscoe's next instructions. The roar of the crowd waned like an echoing boom of thunder in the distance. Heeler Kull hung in his arms, a dead weight.

Something had happened, but Jimmy could not fathom what it was. He was aware only that Heeler made no effort to free himself, or to get a fresh grip. Perhaps, of all the crowd, Briscoe was the first to understand.

*"All right, Jimmy,"* said the director; *"he's out—cold! Lay him down."*

Jimmy pried loose the clutching arms. Heeler Kull sagged till the other's hands were in his arm-pits. Holding him thus, Jimmy walked forward a step or two, straddling the inert body, and laid it gently upon the canvas, face up. The referee pushed him back and began to count over the prostrate form.

*"Eight! Nine!"* A longer pause. *"Ten and out!"*

The referee lifted Jimmy's arm in token of victory. He had won with a clean knockout; the middleweight crown was his. As Briscoe sprang through the ropes, Jimmy drew a long breath, shuddered once, and collapsed.

When the new middleweight champion opened wondering eyes, he became aware that somebody was trying to explain something to him. Jimmy decided he must be hearing things, because the voice belonged to that of the doc in Milwaukee. No, it was Dr. Ballard sure enough. Doc was there, sitting by his side and telling him something over and over again.


*"He's all right."* (Now who did the doc mean by that?) *"You understand, Wing? He's all right. He's come back to his proper self. He's as fit as ever and in six months he'll be at the top of the heap again. You remember I told you that a mental shock might do what my operation couldn't do. That's what happened. He saw you knocked down for the first time in a ring, exactly as he'd planned to have it happen when the light cluster in the studio fell on him. And that—"*

Roving past the surgeon, Jimmy Wing's eyes settled on some one standing behind him. It was Larry. No, it wasn't Larry. It was some one wearing Larry's clothes; some one keen, alert, and eager. It was—

Jimmy struggled up through the blankets.

*"Mr. Briscoe!"*

*"Jimmie!"*



# The Gift House

By E. K. Means

## CHAPTER I.

### GINNY BABE'S ESTATE.

**A** RAGGED, dirty, trampish negro entered the Henscratch saloon and sat down at a table where Skeeter Butts was trying to familiarize himself with the vagaries of some loaded dice. The intruder was not a stranger in Tickfall, but was rated as one of its undesirable citizens. He had seen the inside of a good many parish jails, and had been the guest of the State for several brief terms in the penitentiary.

"When did you git out, Dixo?" Skeeter asked.

"'Bout a week ago," Dixo answered quietly. "But I ain't aimin' to stay out very long."

"It 'pears like you is gittin' powerful slow gittin' enough of jail-houses," Skeeter remarked. "I wouldn't complain ef you made a kick."

"I ain't got no kick," Dixo replied. "I reasons it out dis way: So long as dey is got me in jail I is got a place to eat an' sleep, an' my job is picked out fer me. Of co'se a real healthy man could eat mo' dan I gits, an' sleep a little longer dan they allows me. But it is better dan bein' out."

"Dey turned me out las' week, an' I ain't found no wuck, an' I been sleepin' in de ole cotton-shed, an' I's hongry all de time."

Skeeter looked in to the simple, stupid

face of the speaker, and without being able to express his sentiments, he knew that Dixo belonged to that helplessly criminal class of degenerates, always punished, never pitied, and not always to blame. He felt sorry for the man, and knew when a few days of hunger and wretchedness, loneliness and isolation had wrought their mission upon him, he would be glad to commit some minor offense and go back to prison.

"Got any money?" Skeeter asked. "I might be willin' to he'p you a little bit till you kin think up whut kind of crime you is gwine to comit nex', so you kin git back in de jail-house."

"I don't need no dollars," Dixo said proudly. "I got money enough to burn up a wet dawg."

Thrusting his hand into his pocket he brought forth a sizable roll of soiled and poisonous-looking bills. He spread them out upon the table and counted them under Skeeter's covetous eyes. The sum was ninety dollars.

"Whar did you get all dat, Dixo?" Skeeter asked.

"I didn't steal it," he answered with a grin. "I lied fer it. I talked it outen my ole maw, Ginny Babe Chew. I tole her I had stopped drinkin', stopped cussin', stopped lyin', stopped stealin', an' had done j'ined de chu'ch."

"I done stopped all dem things a thousand times in my shawt life. I tole her I

needed some money to start me on de high road to doin' right an' bein' good, an' she donated dis little dab of dough."

"Did she b'lieve all dat?" Skeeter asked.

"Naw. You cain't slick dat ole jinx. She's a iron-jawed woman, an' she jawed me all kinds of names. She said de white folks had done neglected hangin' me fer a long time. Ole maw kin blimblam when she gits good started. But she let me hab de money, an' dat wus all I wanted."

"I reckon you'll hang around de town till you git it well spent," Skeeter remarked, remembering that Dixo had been a good customer at intervals in the past.

"Naw. No use hangin' aroun' a used-to-wus saloon dat sells chillun an' misses' size in ladylike drinks. I leaves town fer ever," Dixo said sadly. "My maw gived me my walkin' paper, an' I ain't even turn-in' to look back. I sets my foots in de road an' my feet-tracks won't never p'int but jes' one way."

"I hopes you hab luck," Skeeter murmured.

"Accawdin' to maw, I don't need to look fer no luck but lynchin'," Dixo grinned.

"Dat muss hab been some session you had wid dat ole she-boss of de boardin'-house," Skeeter remarked.

"She fotch out a little tin box whut she had dis money in an' turned it down-side up an' poured all de money in my hat. She tole me dat wus de las' money I would ever git offen her.

"She spoke dat she didn't hab nothin' left but de house dat she lived in, an' she wus gwine gib dat house to charity or some yuther noble cause when she died."

"Give it to which?" Skeeter exclaimed.

"She didn't say which," Dixo answered. "She said she might leave it to de Shoofly Chu'ch, or she might leave it to de nigger lodge, or she might leave it to de nigger lift-up sawsiety.

"She talked so much dat a feller like me couldn't keep up wid her. All I'm real shore of is dat I'm suttinly got all I'm ever gwine to git."

A few minutes later Dixo told Skeeter good-by and started down the road toward the depot.

"Ole Ginny Babe ain't gwine live long,

Skeeter," he said on departing. "She'll soon talk herself to death. Mebbe ef you'll pay her a little mind, she'll remember you in her will. I'm shore she won't inherit me no more money."

Skeeter watched the man until he disappeared from sight down the road, the last he saw being his ragged garments fluttering in the dust stirred up by the Gulf breeze. Then Dixo's farewell remark became predominant in Skeeter's mind.

"Ef Ginny Babe aims to leave her house to some noble institution, mebbe I kin git her to will it to de Nigger Uplift. I's president of dat club of lift-uppers, an' de proper pusson to 'vestigate about dat."

## CHAPTER II.

### SKEETER OF THE UPLIFT.

**S**KEETER hastened to the home of Ginny Babe Chew and found that vicious old woman in a state of fury. He had to listen for an hour while she relieved her mind of all the expressions of scorn and contempt she could devise to apply to her worthless son.

For a while Skeeter tried to calm her turbulent spirit by interposing kindly remarks about Dixo. When he found this merely fanned the flame of fury, he reversed his method and agreed with all that Ginny Babe said, adding a few choice epithets of his own.

Thereupon Ginny wanted to know who he was to sit in judgment upon her wandering boy, and, without pausing for a reply, she told Skeeter what she thought he was. At the conclusion of the indictment Skeeter knew that Dixo had nothing on him.

When the storm had thus swept over the ground and left a clear space for action, Skeeter brought up the matter on which he had come.

"Dixo tells me dat you wus aimin' to leave yo' house to some charity an' noble institution. Now you has been pres'dunt of de Nigger Uplift Sawsiety, an' you knows whut a noble wuck dat club does fer de po', oppressed cullud race. I thinks it would be a noble charity ef you would gib yo' home to de Uplifters when you dies."

"Who says I'm aimin' to die?" the woman demanded.

"Nobody. Dixo reckined dat you would talk yo'se'f in yo' grave ef you lived long enough, an' didn't git lockjaw, but I figger dat it won't be soon. You done got de habit of talkin', an' I 'spect yo' mouth will speak words about three days attar you is dead."

"An' I bet dey'll be cuss words mostly," Ginny Babe snapped.

"I hopes not," Skeeter said hastily. "As fur as I'm concerned, I hopes you will live ferever, but nobody cain't tell whut 'll happen, an' ef you don't want dat wuthless Dixo to git yo' praperty, you better make a will befo' you dies."

"Whut you mean by makin' a will?" she asked.

"You kin go down to a lawyer an' tell him who you wants to leave yo' house to, an' he'll fix it up wid writin' so attar you is dead nobody kin git yo' house excusin' de folks you wants to hab it."

The ponderous negro woman raised herself from her chair and reached for her sunbonnet.

"We better go right away, Skeeter," she said. "I ain't intendin' to die very soon. I's feelin' good, but not too good, an' I better play safe."

"I was readin' a medicine almerneck yistiddy, an' I had a touch of mighty nigh all de diseases whut dat book spoke about. I'll leave my boardin'-house to de Nigger Uplift."

With a sigh of gratification, Skeeter rose to escort her to the office of the lawyer, Blon Hanly. This lawyer was one of those pathetic sights so common in our villages, a man who had lost his way. The negroes regarded him as the greatest lawyer in the world, the whites regarded him as a complete failure.

His uniform price for all legal services whatever was ten dollars. Skeeter knew he would have to pay that ten, but it was a small sum in exchange for Ginny Babe's property secured for his favorite club.

They found Blon in his office, and Skeeter explained in a few words what was wanted.

"I can fix you up all right, and it will

cost you only ten dollars," Blon said. "I don't believe in robbing poor folks, and my fees are moderate. Go out and get three men who can write their names as witnesses, while I am preparing this document."

Skeeter should have selected his witnesses among the members of the Uplift League, and pledged them to keep the secret of Ginny Babe's disposal of her property. But he did not think of that, and he had some difficulty in finding witnesses. In half an hour a large number of negroes knew that Ginny Babe was getting ready to die and was disposing of her house by executing her last will and testament.

Skeeter paid the ten dollar fee and took possession of the precious document.

"I's gwine take dis law-paper down to de bank an' ax Marse Tom to keep it in his safe fer me," he exclaimed triumphantly. "We mought hab to wait fawty years befo' Ginny Babe kicks de bucket, an' we cain't run no risk of losin' dis paper."

Skeeter escorted Ginny Babe to her home and thanked her for her great gift to their club.

"I'll shore be int'rusted in yo' state of health, Ginny," he said. "Of co'se, I don't want you to die, but we realizes mo' by yo' death dan we will by yo' livin'. Yo' loss will be our eternal gain. You is a dead loss to us as long as you lives, because you keeps us outen our property."

"Suttinly," Ginny answered. "An' I guess you'll be squattin' aroun' my house like a buzzard waitin' fer my fun'ral."

"Nothin' like dat," Skeeter told her hastily.

"You better not," Ginny warned him. "I owns a mighty handy little shootin'-gun, an' it's de quickest road to de longest waitin'-station you has ever arrived at yit."

### CHAPTER III.

#### BLON GETS AN IDEA.

WHEN the news of Skeeter's achievement got abroad in the town there were two men who were very much distressed. Pap Curtain was the president of the Nights of Darkness Lodge, and felt that Ginny Babe ought to have left the

house to that noble institution. Vinegar Atts was the preacher in charge of the Shoofly Church, and felt that if Ginny had been properly enlightened she would have willed the house to his religious congregation.

Pap Curtain called upon Blon Hanly and secured a little legal advice. After that he hurried to the home of Ginny Babe Chew.

"I hears dat you is givin' away yo' home, Ginny Babe," he began. "I's come to ax you to leave it to de Nights of Darkness Lodge."

"It caim't be did dis late," Ginny Babe told him. "I done willed it to Skeeter Butts an' de Nigger Uplift."

"Dat kin be fixed easy," Pap replied. "Lawyer Hanly tole me dat you could make anodder will at any time."

"Dat's news to me," Ginny Babe said with surprise. "I figgered dat I couldn't gib my house away but only one time."

"You kin gib it to as many as you wants to," Pap assured her. "It's de las' one you gib it to dat gits it."

Ginny Babe meditated for a long time. She had always been just about as popular as a sick dog. She had a desire to be respected and loved. Here was the chance of her lifetime to befriend another noble institution, and be looked upon with favor by all its adherents. While she thought about this, Pap was talking about something else.

"Dis ole house has been used as a nigger boardin'-house fer years. At some time or yuther, evey nigger man has lived in dis house kept by you.

"You oughter die an' leave it to de lodge of men whut has boarded here wid you an' he'ped you keep dis house gwine on endurin' all dese years. Us kin turn it into a home fer our ole an' sick lodge members."

"Dat's pretty fair talk," Ginny encouraged him.

"Besides dem argymints," Pap continued, "five of yo' husbunts is been members of dat lodge, an' all of 'em up an' died on us an' had to be buried at de lodge expense. We gib 'em a pretty nice fun'ral, too. You oughter 'preciate dat fack."

After a little more persuasion Ginny Babe consented to go to the lawyer's office.

The poor drink-sodden Blon Hanly was not above using questionable methods of making money when his finances were low. Pap would have to pay ten dollars for writing another will, and Pap's money was good. So he asked a few questions, drew up the document and collected his fee.

After Pap had pocketed the will and escorted Ginny Babe back to her home, he sat upon the porch for a while trying to imagine himself the manager of the home for aged and infirm lodge members, and then he left her with his thanks and good wishes for a long life, but with the hope in his heart that the old thing would die before the next day.

"I's gittin' ole an' feeble," he soliloquized, as he walked away. "I think we oughter start dat home fer ole an' broke-down lodge members, and put me in as keertaker. I would enjoy settin' on dat porch an' smokin' my pipe while de yuther lodge members fotch me my vittles an' my clothes."

Pap had not been gone long when the Rev. Vinegar Atts appeared at Ginny's home. He found her sitting on the porch smoking a clay pipe. She was enjoying her popularity, and she carried an air of peace and contentment. It was quite pleasant to her to give her house away when she did not have to surrender possession until she had no further use for it.

Having made two wills, she had acquired the habit. When Vinegar suggested that she will it to another worthy cause, she listened with eagerness.

"I think you made a great mistake in not willin' yo' house to de Shoofly Chu'ch, Sister Chew. Now dis house kin be used as a orphanage fer little nigger chillun. Dar is plenty pickaninnies in dis parish whut ain't got nobody to take keer of 'em an' nowhar to stay at."

"My mind oughter kotch on to dat fack at fust," Ginny Babe said. "Dat's de very best use I could make of my house."

"Suttinly," Vinegar agreed. "Ef you leaves dis house to de Uplifters, dey won't hab nothin' here but dances an' cyard parties—it 'll be a gamblin' pen. Ef you leaves it to de lodge, a lot of ole nigger bums an' fancy sons of rest will be settin' aroun' on

de porch whittlin' deir names on de side of de house. But if you leaves it to de Shoofly Chu'ch, a lot of cullud angel chillun will find a happy home an' somebody to keep 'em gwine on till dey grows up."

"Mebbe I could make anodder will," Ginny Babe suggested.

"You kin make one mo'," Vinegar announced. "It's de las' will whut counts, an' de third is de charm, an' you won't be allowed to make but jes' one mo'."

So for the third time that day, Hanly, smiling to himself, prepared Ginny Babe Chew's last will and testament, and collected ten dollars from the Rev. Vinegar Atts. Blon would have been perfectly willing to write wills for the old woman for the rest of his life at ten dollars each. But the judge of the court had warned him several times recently about his peculiar legal methods, and Blon was afraid to carry the farce any further. So he handed the document to Vinegar Atts and said to the woman:

"Don't come back here any more, Ginny. This is the last will and testament that the law will permit me to write for you."

When the two had gone, Blon sat for a long time in deep meditation. He needed ten dollars more. He was sorry that he could not prepare one more will for Ginny.

He saw no other chance to make ten dollars quickly, and he studied the possibilities from every angle. Then he shook his head.

"Those coons have more credulity than judgment," he sighed. "But I have discretion. I can't impose on them any more."

He lighted his pipe and sat idly smoking and watching the few people and teams moving on the street. Times were certainly dull, he reflected. He had made his first money to-day for over a month of waiting.

What and where he was going to eat had resolved itself nearly into the question whether he would take hot or cold water for each meal. This little money would help him out. If only he could get ten dollars more!

A team of young mules were driven down the street by a giant negro. The animals became frightened at a barrel which a workman rolled out of the doorway of a ware-

house, and which fell from the platform and came bumping into the middle of the street.

The team reared and plunged and tried to bolt. The giant driver raised himself quietly from his seat and braced himself for action. In spite of all their efforts, at the end of the incident those young mules were standing right where they were when the barrel stopped rolling, such was the strength and driving skill of Hitch Diamond.

"Thank you, Hitchie," Blon said, as he squinted shrewdly at the giant prize-fighter. "You have given me a free entertainment and a bright idea."

Hitch did not hear this expression, for he was several blocks down the street. Blon knocked the ashes from his pipe, reached for his hat and smiled.

"I've got one more chance of making ten dollars out of Ginny," he announced to himself. "Wonder where I can find the old idiot? I'd like her better if she wasn't as ugly as a skinned mule."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SAD NEWS FOR DIXO.

THREE days passed and the three interested men made daily inquiry about the health of their benefactor. Skeeter knew nothing of the other two wills which Ginny Babe had made. Pap knew that his document annulled the donation made to Skeeter and the Uplifters, but he knew nothing of the will Ginny had made subsequently in favor of the Shoofly Church. Vinegar was careful not to advertise it, saving it as a great surprise when Ginny had passed away.

But for three days Ginny's health remained surpassingly good in spite of the fact that the three men had "put a bad wish on her." The men attributed her abundant life to pure feminine cussedness. Disgustedly, Vinegar confessed to himself that "Ginny is like a rainbow: ain't got no end."

After a while the three men forgot their legal documents in their interest in other things which promised quicker returns.

Then Ginny Babe went for a visit to New Orleans. Each of the men fervently hoped that the train would be wrecked and grind Ginny into sausage meat, as Skeeter expressed it: "Make a fricasseed chicken outen de ole hen."

Skeeter had a hunch and went down to the depot and took out an accident policy on Ginny's life. Losing his money, he remarked mournfully: "Dat ole woman's got as many lives as a litter of kittens."

The old bird arrived in New Orleans without a ruffled feather, and on Sunday she visited a great church for the spiritual enlightenment of the colored people, probably hoping to change her feathers into the plumage of a bird of paradise. She was charmed with the city congregation, the big, electric-lighted, fan-cooled church, the big pipe organ, the surpliced choir, and especially the big-mouthed, big-bodied, loud-toned, leather-lunged, dressy negro preacher.

The week with its last wills and testaments had turned her thoughts to the unsubstantial nature of all sublunary things. Verily the fashion of this earth passeth away. We know not what a day will bring forth. At such a time as we wot not, the angel of death cometh.

She might stub her toe on a brick or get hooked by an automobile-horn and become a casualty. She decided to have the Rev. Dr. Washington Washmun preach her funeral sermon.

She was not dead. She did not expect to die very soon. But it is not an unusual custom for the negroes to have their funeral preached before they die. They rehearse for the funeral as the white people do for a stylish church wedding, and then they attend the funeral services, listen to the remarks of the officiating clergyman, and have a privilege denied to the dead, of revising and editing the discourse.

Ginny Babe's funeral was a great success. She was away from Tickfall where the folks really knew what an ugly, vicious, wicked old thing she really was. Dr. Washington Washmun knew nothing about her, and was careful to make no inquiries which would gum up the wheels of his eloquence. He asked Ginny what kind of a colored

person she was, and what sort of a life she had led, and Ginny gave herself a good recommendation as to spiritual gifts, Christian grace, and religious usefulness.

The preacher gave her the benefit of the doubt, and banked much upon the veracity of her statements on the ground that she carried more suet than any woman he had ever seen. Fat people are generally harmless, good-natured, lovers of peace and calm.

It required some energy to be a wicked person. His Satanic majesty is an active somebody. Witness the book of Job, first chapter and seventeenth verse: "And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, From going to and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it."

Rev. Washington Washmun reflected that Ginny had not traveled far in the satanic footsteps. She was too fat to tote all that ponderosity up and down and to and fro in the earth. So he gave Ginny a good recommendation, transported her to the skies on flowery beds of ease, such as fat folks like, and wound up his elocutionary efforts with a song which Ginny praised extravagantly:

"O dat she in de day of His confin' may say:  
I have fit my way through,  
I have finished de wuck' de Lawd gib me to do!  
O dat she from de Lawd may receive de glad word:  
Well an' faithfully done,  
Enter into my joy an' set down on my throne!"

A dressy little negro left the Old Tabernacle Church after the funeral, caught a Tchoupitoulas Street car and rode to the old French market. He walked through the market, his eyes as bright and watchful as a squirrel's, and his hands in their action as quick as the slap of a cat.

The Italian fruit-venders were watchful, too, but this colored man's movements were quicker than the eye. He secured his dinner of fruit before he passed on.

Going twelve blocks down the river, he walked out on the wharf to the edge of the water. Glancing about to assure himself that nobody was looking, he turned his back to the river, rested his hands on the floor of the wharf and dropped out of sight over the edge.

But he did not touch the water. His feet rested upon a cross-piece nailed to a wooden pier. From this point he climbed like a monkey from pier to pier under the wharf, walking on shaky planks, swinging by his hands, balancing himself perilously, moving back toward the land for a long distance. When he stopped he had reached the rendezvous of the River Rats, a band of negro thieves who pilfered the ships and the warehouses along the water-front.

One man we know was sitting farthest back in the hole, smoking a cigarette. Dixo Chew was not yet in jail, but he expected soon to be. The police were looking for him.

He was like a man who has registered at a crowded hotel but has not yet been assigned a room. He expected to get located any time.

"I ben to a fun'ral, niggers," the dressy negro man began. "It was a big, ole fat woman named Ginny Babe Chew, an' dat chew was a plum' mouthful, b'lieve me. Dat big, ole ugly hash-hound weighs about seven hundred pounds—dat nigger out-niggers any nigger I ever did see. She looks like a lady buffalo. Dey tuck on scandalous at her fun'ral."

The man paused, took a number of large, red apples from his pocket, and tossed one at each of his companions. Dixo Chew caught his, but let it drop on the ground at his feet. His appetite was gone.

"De Revun Wash'ton Washmun done hisself proud at de fun'ral," the dressy man continued, as he sunk his shining teeth into a red apple filched from the market. "He hollered loud, he sung songs all by his own self about dat ole fat slob—"

He broke off, swallowed a mouthful of his apple, and waving the core to make time for his music, he sang in a barber-shop tenor:

"I'm never been dar but I'm been told  
Not made wid hands!  
Dat de streets of de city is paved wid gold  
Not made wid hands!  
I know—I know I hab anodder city  
I know—I know—not made wid hands!"

"Dem suckers had better nail dat gold down ef you gits to any gold-street city," one of the men guffawed. "Ef dey don't,

dey'll shore miss some of it atter you done passed along."

"Dat wus one of de fun'ral songs dat de Revun Washmun sung," the dressy man continued, biting the core of his apple half in two. "Dem niggers all went shoutin' home to heaven on a graveyard trail."

"I knowed dat Ginny Babe Chew," one of the men remarked. "She's de meanest old debbil in de Nunitied States of Loozanny. Did de Revun Washmun tell de truth about her?"

"Naw," the dressy man answered. "Truth ain't in style at no fun'ral. He jes' wasted his time like a dawg barkin' at a knot."

It was some time before they noticed that Dixo Chew had slipped away. He left his big, red apple where he had been sitting. The dressy negro retrieved it.

"Dixo done loss his appetite," he remarked, then stopped with a surprised look. "Huh! Dixo is named Chew. I bet ole Ginny Babe is Dixo's maw, an' she didn't 'vite him to her own fun'ral."

Two hours later Dixo was riding the rods of a freight-train back to Tickfall.

## CHAPTER V.

### DEEDS SPEAK.

**I**N Tickfall, Dixo passed the house where Ginny Babe Chew had lived for many years. It was closed now, paper was scattered about the yard, dust had blown in upon the porch, and the house with its withered clapboards and the paint scaling off looked like an old gray hen in the moulting season.

The emptiness, the loneliness, the silence pulled at the heart-strings of the woman's worthless son. After all, she was the only mother he had. Now she was gone, and he was alone in the world, with no home but a jail.

He went to the Henscratch and told his grief to Skeeter Butts. Skeeter's eyes stood out like the buttons on an overcoat. He did not share Dixo's grief. The exultation depicted on his face at this astounding news was not visible to Dixo, who had his eyes shaded by his hands.

"Maw was a mean ole woman, Skeeter," Dixo sighed. "But I don't hold no grouch ag'in' her now. She done gone whar de wicked cease from troublin' me, an' I'm gwine let her rest in peace. She never did 'preciate me at my real wuth, an' used to beat de stuffin' outen me wid a big stick."

"Dis is puffedly awful sad news," Skeeter sighed, and his dancing eyes and joyous features made him an awful liar. "When did dis dreadful succumstance come to pass?"

"De fust news I knowed of wus de fun'ral at de ole Tabernacle," Dixo said. "I didn't know nothin' about maw bein' sick or nothin'. A nigger feller tole me 'bout de last orgies."

"Did dey bury yo' maw in N'Awleens?" Skeeter asked.

"I reckon so. I hopped de train an' come on here when I heard tell. But I'm shore de ole Tabernacle buried her; dey make a heap outen deir fun'erals, an' don't let no yuther chu'ch butt in on de corp'."

Dixo wandered disconsolately out of the Henscratch, hunting for some other listener to his tale of grief. Ten minutes later Sheriff John Flournoy arrested him on advices from the police department of New Orleans, and that night the two rode back to the city, where Dixo was assigned a room in the booby-hatch, and where he was promised three meals and a bed and careful watching for a long time.

Well, that was what he wanted. It's a great life where you can make arrangements and invariably get what you want.

By the next morning the information was general in Tickfall that Ginny Babe Chew was dead. Besides the testimony of Dixo, somebody saw somebody who had been told by somebody else that he heard somebody say her funeral had been preached in the old Tabernacle. So that settled all doubt. But before anything could be done about it a colored woman on the train told Hitch Diamond that she had attended the funeral, and described with garrulous largiloquence the crowded congregation, the beautiful music, the edifying discourse, and all the rest.

Then the Negro Uplift League, of Tickfall, held a memorial service. Resolutions

were drawn up, speeches were made, appropriate music was sung, and Skeeter, as president of the league, announced that Ginny Babe had willed her house to the Uplifters!

"Dear ole Sister Ginny Babe Chew had her bad habits," Skeeter ranted in his memorial address. "Sometimes I figgered dat she wus a good nigger gone bad, an', frequently I didn't know whether she was de right nigger in de wrong place, or de wrong nigger in de right place, or a nigger wid her head screwed on incorreck. But bless Gawd, she got it all straight at last; she wus de right nigger in de right place, an' she done de right thing fer a righteous cause."

Pap Curtain, president of the Nights of Darkness Lodge, heard this announcement with equanimity, and listened cynically to the rejoicing of the members of the league, knowing that he had a legal document in his possession which would turn the gladness of the Uplifters into mourning and lamentation.

He announced that the pilgrims of the Nights of Darkness would pitch their tents of sorrow on the following night, and at the time set, their ostentatious mourning was conducted with all the rites and ceremonies of that secret order. They paid all honors to Ginny Babe that would have been paid to a member of the lodge.

Pap Curtain announced the reason for this unusual thing: Ginny Babe had left all her property to the Sons of the Nights of Darkness, requesting that her boarding-house should be converted into a home for the old and worn-out members of the lodge, in honor of her five dead husbands who had once belonged to the lodge.

This caused a big powwow, and Skeeter and Pap Curtain nearly came to mortal combat.

The next day being Sunday, Vinegar converted the morning service of his church into a memorial for Sister Ginny Babe Chew, and for the second time her funeral was preached while she was still alive. On this occasion, however, she was not present to hear it.

Had she been, she would have been disappointed. Vinegar did the best he could,

considering his subject and the folks he had to talk to. Everybody knew Ginny Babe in Tickfall. If she had any angel in her, the wings were folded inside so nobody could see them. The preacher was wofully hindered by having to keep within the bounds of truth. Even so, he got clear off the reservation several times.

But when Vinegar reached the point where he announced that Ginny Babe had left her home to the Shoofly Church to be used as an orphanage for homeless, fatherless, motherless children of the poor, oppressed colored race—ah! here was where he put on the most "highsterical 'rousements." Even Ginny Babe would have been satisfied with the effort, for there were no hold-back straps on the orator's mind or tongue.

Then the storm broke. The three conflicting interests met like three great black clouds and broke in a flood of gossip and suspicion and abuse and vituperation and profanity and fist-fights. It started in the churchyard and ran down the street like a stream of noisy black water, and flowed all over the town in little rivulets of indignation.

The colored people, ignorant of the law, did not know that the will would have to be probated. It never occurred to them that the court would have anything to do with the affair. They were going to settle it themselves.

There was a great black giant named Hitch Diamond who listened to all the stormy discussion with a tremendous grin upon his battered prize-fighter mug. He belonged to all three of the organizations to which Ginny Babe had willed her property, and he refused to be drawn into the discussion and debate.

"I b'longs to all three; an' any way you-alls decides, I wins," he grinned. "Anyways, she ain't left so much behind her dat we needs to raise a fuss about it."

"Whut she willed to us is good enough, an' a plum plenty," Vinegar Atts howled, and went on with the controversy.

But toward the middle of the afternoon several men met Hitch and asked him seriously what was the best way to settle the matter.

"Git 'em all togedder in de ole cotton-shed an' fight it out. I'll ref'ree de fight," he said, which was about the sort of suggestion they could expect from a professional pugilist.

That night there was a mass meeting of all the negroes of the village in the old cotton-shed on the edge of the Gaitskill sand-pit. Skeeter Butts, Pap Curtain, and Vinegar Atts, in an effort to settle the controversy, engaged in the most acrimonious debate ever staged in Tickfall. The record of their discussion would be interesting, but nothing they said toward the end of their controversy could be printed.

Vinegar insisted that the matter should be put to a popular vote as to who would get the Ginny Babe boarding-house, for Vinegar knew that the members of his congregation outnumbered all other organizations. But Pap howled a hysterical protest at this suggestion because the Nights of Darkness Lodge was exclusive and had not many members, and Skeeter seconded the protest, for his Uplift League was a highbrow outfit with the fewest members of all.

There were about fifty sacks filled with foodstuff for cattle sitting on end along the side of the building, and most of the members of the Nights of Darkness Lodge were sitting on these sacks, one member to each sack, cawing like a crow, which he did most admirably resemble. Pap Curtain had a trick when he was agitated of holding his pocketknife in the middle, between his thumb and finger, and spinning it by striking the end with his other hand. When very uneasy, he would open the knife and snap the blade with his thumb. He had been doing both stunts for quite a while that evening, altering the performance according to how his feelings were excited or allayed.

The crowd was getting ugly and vociferous. The three last wills and testaments could make as much trouble as Ginny Babe herself.

Vinegar, listening and watching, finally decided that he had the thing by the tail and could pull it down the hill. Certainly the members of the Shoofly Church outnumbered the others, and he must therefore secure a popular vote and insist that all

parties abide by the will of the majority. Springing upon a little platform, he bawled:

"Ever who favors decidin' on dese here wills by a vote, say Aye!"

Instantly the congregation of the Shoofly Church saw their opportunity. There was an upward gushing geyser of whoopful, cackling, shriekful "Ayes!"

Pap Curtain, who had jumped to his feet to protest, now dropped back to his seat on the sack of cow-feed with a mellow plunk like a ripe plum. In the exasperation of coming defeat, he stuck his knife-blade into the sack as if he were plunging it into Vinegar's corpulent form. Then he glanced at the wound the knife had made in the sack, beheld the contents oozing out of the cut, and suddenly sat up with a great hope shining in his face.

"Ever who favors de Ginny Babe will fer de Shoofly Church, say 'Aye!'" Vinegar howled.

Once more there was a response like the voice of many waters and the voice of mighty thunderings.

"Mr. Chairman!" Pap Curtain howled, in the momentary silence which succeeded the outburst, "I calls fer a division of de house!"

"A division of de house is called fer!" Vinegar whooped, secure in the final victory of his cause. "Anybody gwine make remarks?"

There were no remarks, for Pap Curtain was walking down the line of lodge members who were sitting on sacks, whispering eagerly to each one, and showing something that he held in the palm of his hand. Each man nodded and took out his pocket-knife.

"Ever who favors de Ginny Babe will whut gives de boardin'-house to de Shoofly Church, git over on dat side of de cottonshed!" Vinegar shrieked.

The crowd broke and moved over, leaving a few desperate men leaning against some sacks, and a few high-brown highbrows glowering impotently at the exultant Shoofly congregation.

Then the men on the sacks took their knives and ripped the sacks wide open. They contained cottonseed meal, light as flour, yellow as gold.

One hundred handfuls of that golden powder went into the faces of the Shoofly congregation, and the fight was on!

After the first assault there was a pause of surprise, and a silence like that which we are told precedes the storm. Men and women and children looked down at their yellow clothes, streaked with the cottonseed meal.

They saw fifty sacks of that ammunition on the other side of the shed guarded by about fifty men. They outnumbered their opponents four to one. They attacked *en masse*.

They swooped around those sacks, their hands scooped like shovels, and a whirling, shrieking, cursing mob hurled handfuls of the yellow meal into every face they saw, and received a full measure of the same substance in their own.

In a moment nothing could be seen but a golden haze of flying yellow dust which obscured the warriors like a cloud and the noise of the fray gave the impression that a cyclone had come into the shed and had lost the way out.

There can be no assembly of colored folks without babies and hound dogs. Each family has from two to ten of both. The hound dogs furred their tails and reefed their ears and went away from the zone of peril howling their fright to the remotest sections of the town. The babies set up a howl at first, but in a moment the atmosphere was too thick for respiration, so they just naturally abandoned breathing. You may depend on a little negro baby to take care of himself.

The little negro boys and girls, pickaninny size, backed against the wall, their eyes filled with wonder and awe and cottonseed meal. Then the fighting looked good to them, for they had had much experience in dust battles on the streets of Tickfall. With a shriek of pure joy they added their active bodies and busy hands to the fracas, laughing, dancing, shrieking—it was a sight to make an angel reach for a brickbat.

Like water running through a funnel, the crowd converged at the point where Vinegar, Pap, and Skeeter stood, each warrior trying to get close to his chosen leader. Of necessity the three men stood shoulder

to shoulder fighting that howling ring of men, women, and children, each leader suffering as much from the attacks of his friends as from the assaults of his enemies.

Stooping for dust and rising to throw it, stooping for meal and rising, stooping and rising, praying for brickbats, blinded by the dust, their lungs panting for air, coughing, choking, smeared with yellow cottonseed perspiration, all looking like demons in a golden glow—

"My Gawd!" Vinegar Atts bawled. "Gimme air; lemme me outen dis!"

Suddenly the fight was arrested by a high shrill voice exactly like the cackling of a guinea-hen. They recognized the familiar tones of Ginny Babe Chew in the flesh.

"Git out de way, you niggers! Gimme room accawdin' to my fat!"

The crowd surged back in consternation. They huddled in little groups, and some looked like they were getting ready to bolt. Hitch Diamond stepped forward and his rumbling voice thundered:

"Stand hitched, niggers! Ginny Babe ain't dead—ain't never been dead. She ain't aimin' to ha'nt ye!"

Then he leaned back against the wall, covering his grinning mouth with a great

black hand. He had gone to the depot to meet Ginny Babe, and had failed to see the battle. But the yellow warriors were funny enough for him.

"Hitch Diamond tells me dat you niggers is gittin' ready to take possession of my house!" Ginny Babe cackled.

"We wus, but we ain't," Skeeter said, looking down at his ruined clothes.

"You couldn't git it even ef I was real dead," Ginny laughed.

"How come?" Pap Curtain asked.

"Lawyer Hanly come to me atter I made dem three wills an' pussauded me to l'ave my house to Hitchie. Hitchie is my fust-born son of my secont-married husband, so I paid de lawyer ten dollars, an' he dedeed over dat house to Hitch wid a deed."

"Dat means dat dese here wills ain't nothin' but words," Vinegar mourned. "Us chicken-headed niggers is done a mighty lot of cacklin' over a mighty small egg."

"Nothin' but words," Ginny said with a wicked laugh.

Hitch reached over and patted his mother's fat shoulder. Whatever her faults, Ginny had always been good to him.

"Deeds speak louder dan words," Hitch said.

(The end.)

## THE PASSING OF A MIRAGE

BY MAY STAYTON

AS some lone traveler in desert ways  
Thrills at the sight of palms—how green, how fair!—  
So I, when deep into your eyes I looked,  
Thrilled at the love-light softly gleaming there!

And as he, springing to the promised shade,  
Finds in a moment that it fades away,  
So have I found the light all false, untrue,  
That glimmered in your eyes and made my day.

'Twas but the picture of some happier spot  
That mirrored on the burning desert shone;  
'Twas the reflection of my own heart's fire  
Deceived me. Tears have quenched the flame. 'Tis gone!

# Pride of Tyson

by John Frederick

Author of "Crossroads," "Luck," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

GARTH, rough and uncouth, had brought with him to the Chiluah Valley Dam Henry Tyson, brother of the girl he worshiped at a distance. Garth's secret motive was that Tyson's presence would bring thither the girl of his dreams. Tyson, for his part, was obsessed with the desire to condition himself by work on the dam so that he could take his revenge for the defeat he had sustained in a friendly bout with Garth. And at his own insistence he had contracted to exist for six months on his wages as a day laborer.

During a period of near-starvation, when he had foolishly purchased a gorgeous necktie which appealed to his imagination, Tyson met Rona Carnahan, engaged to Kennedy, a gambler. Rona told him of a curious legend which ran that whoever should see the "face" of the mountain of La Cabeza would either die within the year or marry the girl of his dreams. But Rona had bestowed the tie on Kennedy, and now, as he carried a bottle of whisky which the girl had bought for her father, he accidentally smashed it. Rona leaped at him with a knife, but at the sound of church bells her hand dropped; she begged his forgiveness. Then, together, they went to her father, who, with Padre Miguel, the girl's confessor, greeted them with old-world courtesy.

This, however, the priest gone, vanished in an insane wrath at the news of the breaking of the bottle, to be in turn soothed by the playing of the old man's violin. Tyson took his leave, and, following a visit at his room from Kennedy, who slapped his face, warning him away from Rona, Tyson, at Kennedy's gambling hell, won back from the latter the vivid tie which he had presented to the girl.

Meanwhile, at Garth's office suddenly appeared Margaret Tyson, who, after bewildering the big man with her beauty and poise, and making him feel more than ever uncouth, went to the boarding-house to find her brother. A climb up the odorous stairs was followed by a knock at the door, and the disclosure of an amazing figure—amazing, at least, to the girl. She recovered slowly from the shock. That wavering, gaunt-faced man was not the one she knew. He was not clean.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### THE BUILDER.

INDEED, he showed that he had been through the fire. For the long test through which he had just passed showed plainly. And how could she tell the leanness of hard training and gaunt muscles, and the staggering of sleep, from the meagerness of starvation and the weakness of undernourishment?

"Hal!" Margaret cried, "what in the name of Heaven have you been doing?"

Then her arms were around his neck.

"Hal, dear," she said over and over, her voice beginning to tremble with grief and anger, "what have they been doing to you?"

He extricated himself slowly and stared

at her. There was no mirror to make him understand her horror.

"What's all this pity about?" Tyson said, frowning a little. "But, oh, it's good to see you. Don't stand so horrified. I'm not a ghost. Gad, I'm hard as iron!"

He flexed his arms to try his muscles, and smiled down at her. Now that the sleep was leaving him, he could see her clearly for the first time, and as they sat down, he rested his head against the back of the chair and feasted his eyes upon her. She was all that he had been missing, to Tyson. She was a breath of fresh air, a vision which he had almost forgotten in the sweat and slime of the cement house.

"Hard day," he explained, "and I hit the bed without changing my clothes. Awfully fagged, you see."

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 3.

Margaret drew her chair beside him and took his hand. "Now," she asked, with the quiet insistence which he remembered in her, usually—"now, Hal, will you tell me what all this is about?"

"My trip West?" he asked vaguely.

"Why does this Mr. Garth keep you out here in the desert?" she asked, and all the time her eyes examining him, and behind her eyes there was a promise of danger for some one. The fighting blood of the Tysons was in her in full measure, as Hal knew well enough.

"He doesn't keep me here, Margaret. I stay of my own free will."

"He only told me that you were this—not like this!" she said angrily. "Why hasn't he sent a doctor to you?"

"Ah?" muttered Tyson. "You've talked with him. Did he say that I was weakening on the job?"

He chuckled.

"He only said that you were working too hard."

"Ah?"

His eyes shone with gratification.

"But why has he let you get in this condition?" Her voice rang dangerously. "The rough-handed vulgarian!"

Tyson queried: "Didn't I write to you that I was trying myself out at a man's work?"

"It was an amusing letter," said Margaret Tyson. She turned his palm up. "Oh, Hal!"

The rough sacking of the cement had torn away the skin inside his hand and left it almost raw, and there were blisters at the finger-tips.

"Manual labor?" said Margaret.

He began to laugh again. It pleased him to see how completely she had misjudged him. She thought of him as of a sort of hot-house, decorated species of man, not fit for the labors of the world.

"And Mr. Garth knows you're in this condition?" asked the girl with ominous calm.

"I tell you, he has nothing to do with it, except that he first suggested that I come out here."

"What in the world, Hal, could make you torture yourself of your own free will?"

"I want to show you something," he murmured, rising. "Come over to the window."

He pushed aside the curtain and remained clinging to it for support. With the other hand he gestured out over the desert.

"Look!" he commanded.

The view carried down over the roofs of La Blanca and then shelved rapidly away across the desert. In the infinite distance the gray-black of the sky met the blue-black of the land, and everywhere the desert was dotted with lights; some of them moved, but almost as slowly as stars, at that distance; and those lights which were farthest away seemed solitary, single rays. It looked like a harbor, with ships at anchor.

"It's the work of the night shift," he said. "I see it every evening from this window. And when I'm tired out, as I am now, it puts new life into me. Do you wonder that I stay with this game?"

"I'm trying to understand," said Margaret, "but you never were interested in things like this before."

"You never can tell what sort of a soldier a man will make until he gets into a war," answered Tyson calmly. "But out here I feel as if I were one of the ranks—a unit in a marching column. Can you guess at what I mean?"

She lifted her face from the desert scene to Tyson, and winced as she saw his sunken eyes.

"There is something fine in it," she admitted. "It means so much to you, Hal?"

"I'm a small part—the very smallest part," he said humbly, "but for the first time in my life I'm a constructive, not a destructive force. That means a good deal."

He encountered her critical eyes, shrewd with suspicion.

"Don't laugh at me," he challenged. "I feel rather deeply about all this."

She looked away, smiling.

"And Garth?" she said.

Tyson drew a quick breath, and then looked straight in the eyes of Margaret.

"I suppose you think it's odd that such a fellow could influence me?"

"He seems rather—*queer*," she suggested. "Not exactly your sort of man."

"You don't know him," replied Tyson quickly. "You see the rust; you don't see the finely tempered steel that lies underneath. Oh, there's metal in that man!"

He nodded in silent conviction. "He has qualities you would never dream from hearing him talk. You must see him in action. A pile-driver is a blunt and ugly thing in action, but when it drops it shakes the earth. This isn't an age for heroics in the ordinary sense of the term, but perhaps you'll understand me when I say that Garth is truly one of the heroes of the industrial world.

"If you take a deep breath as you stand here at the window you'll taste the alkali in the air. Think, Margaret! In six months, when someone stands at this same window and draws the same kind of breath he will taste the scent of green, growing things. Growing things on the desert! And that's what Garth will have done! Think of it! The power of a man who can affect the very quality of the air."

She nodded dubiously, but something of his excitement was beginning to affect her. She was very lovely standing against the black of the night with her eyes commencing to gleam.

"I'll look at him in a different manner when I meet him again. But it's hard to get past his exterior. I'm afraid that I haven't much insight."

"Possibly not," he said dryly. "But don't bother your head about him. He's purely a man's man."

"Tell me more about him."

"You're open to conviction?"

"At least, I'm interested."

"Haven't I told you enough about him?"

"But I should think that you'd love to speak of him. If you are the soldier, he's the general."

"I could talk with you all night," he said, "and never leave the subject of Garth. In fact, he hasn't been out of my mind this fortnight. Never for half an hour at a time. I even dream of him."

"If I didn't know you, Hal, I'd call this hero worship."

"He'll have the same effect on you, once

you get past his exterior. Consider the man who came out here and looked at this white stretch of burning, useless sand with a muddy trickle in the midst of it, and out of that caught the idea of the dam. Something in that?"

"There is something in him," she said thoughtfully, "but I was inclined to call it mere mass of physical strength."

"Listen to me. Once he started he met the most terrific difficulties. His labor merely to finance the dam was enough to fill the lives of two ordinary men. But then the mechanical troubles. He had to build this entire town and make it like a true bit of Mexico to hold his employees. Then the dam itself. It was a terrible task to haul fuel to the dam; no railroad came within twenty miles until he built his own branch, and even operation of the branch line was an expensive thing. They had worked for several months, and it seemed hopeless."

Tyson was so wrapped up in his subject that he forgot to watch the effect on Margaret. She was looking far away, like one who struggles to understand difficult music.

"Garth went to the upper waters of the Chiluah, tunneled a whole mountain, brought two streams together, carried them to a cliff's edge, and erected an electrical plant. Hence the electric light in this room!" And he pointed to the little globe.

She smiled at his enthusiasm, but the smile went out quickly. She felt as if Tyson was probing the soul of that big, clumsy man, and the result was a revelation.

"Hard work over?" and the eye of Tyson hardened and brightened. "No, the worst lies ahead of him. He has to have the dam completed before the spring floods strike down the valley. If he loses that first rush of water he might as well leave the gates of the dam open for another year. Yes, if he is a week late with his work this year is thrown away."

"So he is fighting every minute. He labors day and night. He drives his men with whips, you might say. Yet he has to keep his labor contented while he wrings the last possible drop of effort from them."

"And think what a terrible danger hangs over him all the time. If the rains come

before he is done! Suppose some little thing should hold up the completion of the dam for a few days—ruin! It is like a magnificent and strong machine that can be ruined by the dropping of a single little bolt. What a tragedy that would be—the dropping of the little bolt!”

He left the window. He began to walk spiritedly up and down the room.

The critical gleam had left the eyes of Margaret Tyson, for as her brother talked she saw a new vision of this Garth, this heavy-handed son of the soil. She and Henry Tyson had grown up in a close intimacy, more as man to man in friendship than as brother and sister, and her whole urge was to follow him in his likes and dislikes. So that now she dropped that barrier she had raised against Garth—that barrier of good taste—and prepared to find the good in the man, beneath the rough exterior.

More than the words of her brother described Garth, she felt the man in the change which had come over Henry. Before, he had been a pleasant and amiable wastrel. Now he was a force, for good or for evil. It seemed to her that she had only known the surface of Henry before; now he was stirred up from the depths.

Her earlier alarm was dissipated now that excitement had sent the blood pumping into his cheeks and given surety to his poise and balance. He was rather worn than exhausted.

“I’ll go now,” she said, “and let you sleep. Mr. Garth has asked me to stay at his house. I’m going to watch him with a sharp eye, Hal. If he’s a tithe as great as you say, he’s worth knowing.”

He would have followed her down to the front door, but she waved him back, and he heard her heels tapping lightly down the stairs.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### GOLDEN SILENCE.

GARTH’S hours at the dam this night were cut short, for after Margaret left, his brain refused to function. Finally he hurried into his clothes and

went back to La Blanca; he must prepare his mother for the arrival of Margaret.

He found her in her own room in a dressing-gown, finishing the reading of her chapter in the Bible, which always closed the day’s duties with her. Indeed, life was simply a compound of duties to Mrs. Garth. It was never what she wished, but what she *ought* to do that governed her actions. He went to her, raised her face between his big hands, and kissed her withered, patient forehead.

“Mother!” he cried, stepping back from her, “what do you think has happened?”

There was just a flicker of emotion in her face, like the play of light across the ceiling when the headlights of an automobile flash past the window.

“It ain’t hard to guess, Eddie,” she said. “The girl has come?”

“Now, how in the world did you guess that?”

“Well, you got a kind of foolish look, Ed,” she answered, a little dryly.

He laughed boisterously.

“She’s not only come, but she’s going to stay with us. Think of that!” he added. “Aren’t you happy about it?”

“Comin’ here?” she repeated vaguely. “Why, Eddie, how in the world can I talk to a girl like that?”

He did not hear her.

“Get into your clothes, mother. Please. She’ll be here any moment; with her brother now. What room ’ll we put her in? D’you think that room facing on the south—that corner room—will—”

Mrs. Garth rose. She had a way of taking command of things in a crisis.

“Eddie, you go down-stairs and sit down. Don’t be worryin’ about anything. I’ll take care of the room for her.”

“But I want to see how—” he persisted.

“Eddie,” she said sharply, “there ain’t any call for you to help me run this house. You go down-stairs, and everything ’ll be all right.”

Force of habit made him obey, but he paused at the door.

“Put on one of your best dresses, will you, mother?”

“I’ll put on something good enough. Get along with you.”

After he was gone her assumed coolness disappeared, and she fell into a tremor. She went to the wardrobe and turned on the light and looked over the array of gowns and dresses and coats which Edward had insisted upon for her. She had put it off from day to day until he compelled her to go shopping. She *had* to be properly dressed when she entertained some of those formidable associates of her son.

The result was that she fell into the hands of an enterprising clerk who fitted Mrs. Garth out from head to heel. The prices were right enough, but the gowns ranged through filmy things which might have become a débutante to singularly colored creations such as are usually worn by women of "a certain class."

Mrs. Garth had no great liking for such clothes. But she felt that since the outlay in money had been so great she must not neglect any of the gowns. So she wore them in rotation, one after the other, with a religious regularity.

As she looked them over now she squinted her eyes and strove to imagine what Miss Tyson would be wearing. All that she could think of was the picture, with the suggestion of a very low neck.

Mrs. Garth, by instinct, set about looking for a dress with a high collar attached, following an unvoiced thought which bade her put the newcomer in her place. She wanted something sufficiently severe and also sufficiently impressive.

What she chose was a black gown thickly spangled. Over the arms and shoulders and bosom it was a heavy lace, and a tall lace collar propped up her head. It wasn't an easy dress to get into, but Mrs. Garth managed to labor and reviewed herself with some complacency in the glass. The waistline was quite high, and the dress fell off into a sweeping, abbreviated train effect.

Mrs. Garth, when she turned suddenly, found the cloth swishing silkenly around her legs, and the picture was very much like pictures she had seen in magazines—of actresses and others of renown.

She decided that dress would do—plain, but just rich enough, and *full* of style. She gave her hair another approving pat, tossed her shawl over the spangled shoulders, and

went to look at the bedroom. It was not the corner room of which Edward had spoken. That was her room of state, and certainly should not be wasted upon any sprig of a girl. She chose, instead, one of the side rooms, an ample apartment.

Moreover, the furnishings struck the eye more impressively than did the corner room of state. The heavy blue carpet figured with red roses seemed to Mrs. Garth quite the most cheerful pattern she had ever seen upon a floor. The walls were yellow and brown—quite different from the carpet—but a success in a different way.

Moreover, Miss Tyson, even if she did come from New York, could search the world over before she'd find another chair more imposing and comfortable than the Morris in the corner with the cushions of bright green plush. Mrs. Garth was particularly partial to green. She had read somewhere that it was good for the eyes—rested the optic nerve.

Yes, the room was quite all right in every way, except that Miss Tyson must not be left to think them an unliturgical household. Mrs. Garth hurried back to her own room and brought forth an armful of her favorites. There was a volume collected from the minor English poets entitled: "Gems of the Hearth and Home." There was a book called: "Self-Control, and How to Practise It." Stanley's "Darkest Africa" gave a cosmopolitan touch, and a Bible finished the little group.

If Miss Tyson wished to read in her bed in the morning—that was probably her fashion—she would have plenty of suitable books for the purpose.

Mrs. Garth cast a final glance at the room to make sure that all was as it should be, and then went down to her son.

She found him pacing the living-room in great agitation; he cast a troubled glance at her, and then fumbled among some scarlet flowers in a tall, yellowish vase, putting them in order. She watched him sadly, and it seemed to Mrs. Garth as if she were looking upon her boy just before he went upon a long journey from which he might never return.

A brisk wind setting up the valley of the Chiluah had turned the night cool, and the

great fireplace at the end of the room was filled with burning logs. They made it too warm when one stood near, but they cast a pleasant light over the rest of the room, and, as Edward said, they made the place seem more hospitable. He always connected open fires with comfort, which was a prejudice inherited from the bitter winters of his childhood.

Presently the door opened and a mosee announced Miss Tyson. Garth made a convulsive movement to go, and then recollected himself and asked his mother to meet the girl. She saw that his face was set, and his hands nervous, and her own sorrow gave place for an instant to pity for him and the same dull anger at the girl.

She found Margaret Tyson in the hall in the act of taking off her linen duster. She could not see the girl distinctly at first; she rather saw her own false picture of Margaret, so she went forward with her hand extended and with the crisp rustling of her bespangled dress comforting her ears.

"This is Miss Tyson, I believe?"

She had read that, and the formality of it stayed with her; then the other turned quickly, and Mrs. Garth glimpsed a flashing smile, and very large, very dark eyes. Mrs. Garth felt that small, cold sense of pain which comes to most plain women and to all mothers of men when they see a very lovely young girl. Then the slender, gloved hand was in hers, and she was listening rather to the musical voice than to the words themselves.

The first thing she noted clearly was the simplicity of Margaret Tyson's clothes. But of course those were her traveling-clothes, and one cannot be judged by what she wears on the sooty cross-continent trains. Next she noted that she was not being examined in the cool, critical fashion for which she had prepared herself. The girl took everything for granted, apparently. Or was that her art? They went back into the living-room, while Margaret was taking off her gloves.

Mrs. Garth dreaded seeing her son standing with his feet spread apart and his arm dangling awkwardly at his sides awaiting Margaret; she was infinitely relieved when she found Edward in the act of pushing

up a big chair nearer the fire. He was quite natural and at ease as he greeted Miss Tyson.

They settled down, Margaret sat facing toward the fire, in the center, with Garth on her right and Mrs. Garth to her left, and as the firelight played over the face of the girl Mrs. Garth's heart sank. It seemed as if a river of feminine might was sweeping down around her son; he could never struggle against it; he could never look beneath that face. She, Mrs. Garth, would have to do his looking for him.

"I've just come from Hal," the girl was saying. "He's very thin—looks rather ill, too."

There was some degree of reproach in her voice.

"Yes," nodded Garth. "He insists on taking the hardest manual labor he can find at the dam. But don't you think it's rather fine for him to adopt that attitude?" "I suppose you know why he's doing it?"

"Perhaps I do, in part."

"I can tell you."

She turned directly upon Garth, and the elder woman caught her breath. In her day women never stared boldly on men. They observed the trousered sex with side glances, mostly. But Margaret Tyson rested her elbow on the arm of the chair and dropped her chin upon the back of her knuckles and looked at Edward with a steady smile.

Mrs. Garth blinked. She felt as Hannibal might have felt had he watched the artillery tactics of Napoleon at Austerlitz. These revolutionary tactics took her breath.

"I'll tell you why," ran on the charming voice. "It's because Hal is carried away with admiration of you, Mr. Garth. He's actually happy to share your work—even if he is doing no more than swing a pick—or lift sacks of cement."

It warmed Mrs. Garth's heart to hear that. This was the right spirit to have toward her son; if young Tyson was capable of this, his sister might not be so bad after all.

But: "I'm afraid I shall have a hard time making him go back home with me," said Margaret. "I wonder if he thinks

he can make an engineer out of himself by manual labor. Well, I suppose it's more devotion to you than to the work."

There was a certain lightness combined with perfect poise that shook all of Mrs. Garth's conceptions of what women should be. Everything seemed to run easily off the back of this girl. She was quite unaffected by awe when she talked to Edward Garth, builder of the Chinah Dam.

These thoughts swallowed the attention of Mrs. Garth for a time until her son rose and went toward the phonograph.

In the interval of silence Mrs. Garth watched the girl's eyes covertly as they moved about the room, and she could see those glances literally pick up object after object and drop them again. It was nothing which the elder woman would have noted ordinarily, but to-night she was super-acute, and she read Margaret's mind. Accordingly, she shrank, and then hardened herself and tensed her nerves and her mind.

"What'll you have?" Garth was asking.

"Anything you're fond of," she replied carelessly.

There was that in her tone which suggested that she would probably disapprove of his choice, it seemed to Mrs. Garth.

"Well, most of this stuff is classical."

"Yes?"

There was just the faintest raising of her eyebrows when she said this, and Mrs. Garth flushed.

"Do you care for other things?" asked Garth.

"Oh, yes. I think some ragtime is bully."

"D'you like 'Lucia'?"

"Lucia?" And Mrs. Garth noted with a pang the different pronunciation. "Rather. A little sickly-sweet, though, isn't it?"

"That record cost seven dollars and a half," stated Mrs. Garth coldly.

"Really?" And she turned a dim smile on her hostess.

"Here's a lot of Caruso," boomed Garth.

"Take him all through, he's the most expensive of the lot," pursued Mrs. Garth, intent on being pleasant to the limit of her faculties. Otherwise, Edward would be cross with her. "Queer how much money there is in singing, ain't it?"

"Very. I think the violin goes better on the phonograph than vocal music. Any instrumental records?"

That took Mrs. Garth's breath.

"According to the price-list," she announced, "they ain't near as fine!"

"Try anything you wish," urged Margaret, turning. "Select it yourself."

But Garth was discouraged. He came back and took opportunity to cast a thunderous frown toward his mother; she wondered why.

"It's rather late for music, anyway," he said, uneasily, "and we'll have plenty of time to play that stuff later on. Besides, you must be very tired from your trip."

Miss Tyson agreed that she was, and presently she said good night to Edward and went up-stairs with Mrs. Garth. She seemed to like the room very much, and Mrs. Garth warmed sufficiently to call her attention to the green-cushioned Morris chair. Miss Tyson's trunk had already been brought up. No, there was nothing she wished.

"If you want to do any readin'," pursued Mrs. Garth, "you may like these books. Travel, poetry, moral writin'. You can take your pick."

Miss Tyson took up one at random: it was the Bible, and it fell from her hand, face down, on the floor, fluttering. Mrs. Garth picked it up with a little exclamation.

"The Book of Job!" she cried. "I suppose that means awful bad luck—to one of us!"

"Oh, I think not," said Margaret, smiling. "I'm very fond of the Book of Job."

"Are you?" said Mrs. Garth, wondering. "It's very hard on Job, though, ain't it?"

"Yes. I always wonder when I finish it, whether the devil won, or God? What do you think, Mrs. Garth?"

The latter stood agape; and then closed her lips severely.

"I never saw two ways to it," she observed. "Good night, Miss Tyson. If you want anything, please let me know."

And then she fled.

She found Edward walking swiftly up and down the living-room, his head bowed; his hands clenched behind him.

"Well," said Mrs. Garth dryly. "D'you like Miss Tyson as well as ever?"

He didn't seem to hear her for a moment, and then he turned and cast out his hands in a gesture of impatience.

"Is it a question of whether or not we like her? Mother, dear, I wonder what she thinks of us?"

"Personally," said his mother stiffly, "I could get along without knowing."

But Garth had resumed his brooding and pacing. For the first time in his life he was walking a path on which she could not join him. She looked at the sway of his broad shoulders, and wondered how there could be any human problem sufficient to stand in his path; and then she looked at the chair where Margaret Tyson had sat. Suddenly Garth stopped and faced her again.

"What's wrong with all this?" he asked, with a broad gesture.

"Wrong with what?"

"Wrong with the room—wrong with ourselves. Everything was all right until she came; and now everything's impossible! What is it?"

She could have told him, but her greatest wisdom lay in her careful selection of silences.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### GRAPEFRUIT AND OTHER THINGS.

SHE wore something white; she looked as cool as a flower, and as fragile of color; she had greeted him pleasantly but without enthusiasm; he had failed to seat her at the table.

These things and a jumble of others filled the mind of Garth as they sat at breakfast. Also, he felt the quiet eye of his mother upon him. He knew that she did not like Margaret Tyson; he knew that she would be trebly pleased if anything should come between the girl and himself.

In the mean time he went ahead, eating absent-mindedly and thinking and trying to plan. In the midst of this, the cool eye of Margaret flickered across him and brought him up standing, so to speak. There had been aversion, contempt, disgust, in that

glance. He could not tell what. Perhaps none of the three, but certainly an element of coldness.

Then he discovered that he was squeezing the last of the juice out of his grapefruit into his spoon—and she was hardly started on her own fruit. Heaven alone could tell him how he had progressed so rapidly. He must have been eating like a mucker shoveling coal; and that would explain the quiet content in the eye of his mother also.

"Can you tell me about the hotels in La Blanca?" the girl was saying.

"Certainly," nodded Mrs. Garth.

"Hotels?" echoed Garth heavily. "What do you want to know about hotels?"

"I have to make a choice among them, you know," smiled Margaret Tyson.

His heart fell a vast distance, and his throat became dry.

"Why, you're going to stay here, aren't you, Miss Tyson?"

She seemed mildly, rather coolly surprised. Yet had it not been understood the evening before that she would stay with them while she was in La Blanca?

"You're very kind," smiled Margaret Tyson. "I really can't do that."

"Why not?"

At his blunt question he caught just a flicker of her lashes against her cheek. He had cornered her, he felt, rather brutally, but quite effectually. Then his mother went swiftly and quietly to her assistance.

"Of course you know that you're welcome here, Miss Tyson," she said. "But I understand, well enough, that you'd feel freer in a hotel. And there's a perfectly good hotel in town."

Garth could have browbeaten her like a man, for that speech. He cast a sharp, ominous glance at her, and then looked back to Margaret Tyson. She was nodding and smiling in relief at Mrs. Garth. Confound these women and their subtleties!

"Hotel?" he growled. "Not fit for a dog. Couldn't think of letting you go there. Not at all. Why, there's only one, and that's full of the greasers. Terrible place, Miss Tyson."

There was rather worry than hesitation in her eyes. Mrs. Garth came to her rescue again.

"Why, what do you mean by saying that, Edward? You know perfectly well that they don't allow the peons in the hotel. Only the upper class Mexican gentlemen are permitted to register!"

"Mexican gentlemen?" snapped Garth. "There isn't such an animal; only difference is in their clothes."

"I'm sure I could stand them for the few days I'm here," said the girl. There was a finality about that speech which stopped Garth's retort. Only a dull rage against the world possessed him.

"You'll take me down there after breakfast?" she was inquiring of him.

"If you want to go," he answered. "Of course."

Then he wanted to curse himself. If she had to leave, why couldn't he be graceful about it? He was showing his hand disgracefully, he felt. And he saw that a thousand impalpable barriers were still between them. He wanted to lean across the table and smash those barriers with a single gesture, and take her hand. Why not? Why not out with it, and tell her that he loved her at once? He glowered down at his cereal bowl, and then stabbed the spoon into it. Everything in the world was wrongly arranged.

He had brought her these thousands of miles across the continent, and here he had lost her in an instant. His own mother was sufficiently to blame for that; he could feel her exultation as she sat with her downward eyes upon the table.

And Margaret? He felt always the cool survey of her eyes, her aloofness. The same sense of shame flooded up hotly in him, which he had felt when Tyson himself refused to dine at Garth's house. Pride! That was the secret of it all. The accursed pride of the Tysons!

Then it happened with the suddenness of thunder out of a blue sky. Rapid feet leaped up the steps to the front door, a hand beat heavily and rapidly, there were loud, excited voices in the hall. And now a white-faced man raced into the dining-room. He was one of the foremen.

"Mr. Garth," he cried, oblivious of all the others. "Gas, gas in No. 4 tunnel! Five men were caught, and—"

He gasped, and stopped for lack of breath. He had run a long distance.

Garth had risen, and the sudden straightening of his legs sent his chair reeling backward and crashing to the floor.

"Hell!" he said fiercely. "Why wasn't I called on the phone?"

"Phone?" The eyes of the other wandered helplessly. "I didn't think—"

"Five men in the tunnel?" the words came snapping out.

"No, we got out four, and then the gas drove us back. The other poor devil may be dead now—"

"José!" thundered Garth.

Margaret Tyson and Mrs. Garth has risen, staring, white-faced, at each other. Death had stepped into the room. And now, with a single gesture, Garth had whipped off his coat and stood rolling up his sleeves. He was like one prepared to wrestle for his life. All the self-consciousness which had entangled him as he sat at the table was now gone. He was free, clear-eyed, firm-voiced. And Margaret Tyson, wondering, watched him. She caught her first glimpse of the man her brother had prepared her to see.

"José!" roared Garth again.

A Mexican mozo flashed into the doorway.

"The car. Get it out! Be damned fast about it! Bring it to the front."

No confusion of thought. His mind worked clearly and easily. He was meeting the danger. He strode for the door, and Margaret hurried after him, following an impulse.

"Miss Tyson!" cut in the sharp voice of Mrs. Garth. "There ain't anything you can do. Let the men folks handle it."

But Garth, at the door, whirled on his heel and swept her from head to heel with a glance such as had never passed over her in her life before. It probed her, measured her, summed her up in one flash of insight.

"D'you know anything about asphyxiation?" he snapped.

"Yes," she answered quietly. And she felt her heart rise.

"Then you come with me. I may need you."

He added: "There's the car now."

"Just one moment," she said, "and I'll get my hat up-stairs."

He threw the door open.

"You come as you are. Quick!"

Even then he was in the car before her, springing in with one leap from the curb, and before she had well settled herself in the seat, and closed the door after her, he had sent the car lurching down the street.

The foreman, yelling for them to wait, raced after, but the car gathered speed like a running horse, and whipped away out of reach of his voice.

It was a big machine, low-hung, with a long, gray hood stretching out in front, and it nosed with uncanny speed down the streets of La Blanca.

It turned corners here and there, but went around the last corner on two wheels.

She cast a sharp glance at Garth at that. She had ridden with speed maniacs before, and she knew the type of man who drives hard to frighten a woman; but Garth leaned his broad shoulders forward, and his big hands had the wheel in a death grip.

He was not driving for any motive of pleasure. He was driving with an intent eye fixed before him, and a wrinkle of painful anticipation carved on his forehead.

They whizzed past a cart, and the driver yelled with terror as the fenders flicked under the noses of his pulled-up horses. They skidded past a turn and whirled into the open roadway leading from La Blanca to the dam. And she sighed with relief as the car stretched out on the open road.

But there was no relief in Garth's actions. He did not lean back against the cushions and smile across to her for an appreciation of his fine driving through the traffic. He bent even lower over the wheel, and now the motor hummed up through a swift crescendo as the car stretched out toward the looming mass of the dam.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### CONCERNING HOTELS.

THE wind cut across her face, now, and left her almost breathless. She had never before ridden at such a rate, for the car bowled along, lurching past the un-

even places in the road. At every rise it seemed to lift into the air, and landed with a thud farther on, wrenching the heavy body and straining the springs.

Yet she felt, with sudden surprise, that she had no fear. The man knew his car, and he knew his road, and he was driving not to break a record or to get a thrill, but to beat death in that gas-filled tunnel up the Chiluah. She felt that he probably was quite unaware of the rate at which they were traveling. His thoughts were already up there at the tunnel gaging the chances of life for that unfortunate—perhaps one of those greasers of whom he had spoken so contemptuously the moment before.

Now they heeled up the slope and swerved down past the rim of the dam, and across the valley.

Where the first cliffs jutted up she saw a dark cavern, perfectly round, and before this there was a crowd of several hundreds already gathered.

The scream of the horn cleared Garth's path, and he brought the car to a grinding stop with foot and emergency brakes at the very edge of the tunnel.

On the ground, hatless, his hair blown up stiffly by the wind, his big arms bare to the elbows, he faced the crowd.

"Is he out yet?" he called.

The only white man in sight stepped up to him.

"No chance, Mr. Garth," he said. "The tunnel is full of gas."

"I know that. Don't tell me what I know already. I asked you if the man was out of that tunnel yet?"

"This is the point," answered the other, flushing, and he produced a blue-print. "The tunnel runs—"

"Damn your plans! I know the tunnel by heart if it's been run as I ordered. Why haven't you got him out?"

"Three times we tried—" began the other, white about the lips with anger.

"Who tried?"

"My men."

"These?" A wide gesture embraced the peons, who stood agape. "Why in hell didn't you go in yourself?"

"I?" stammered the other. "Go into that hell for the sake of a—"

"Bah!" growled Garth. "A life is a life."

And with the word still on his lips he had turned and plunged into the night of the cavern. The foreman stepped back, growling. He looked toward Margaret with a shamefaced smile, prepared to explain, but she looked through and through him, and to the peons beyond.

"Are you going to let him go in alone?" she cried.

There was a stir among the peons, and then a rumble of voices and a shaking of heads. She stamped in her anger. She would have gone herself, but in case of accident, what could she have done with the vast bulk of Garth? Already his footsteps had echoed away to silence in the tunnel.

Then a voice came from the crowd; her brother stood beside her.

"He's in there," was all she could say.

"Who?" asked Hal, with his usual self-control.

"Garth! Garth, of course!"

"But what's up?"

"Gas. Some one's caught in there, and these—men—won't go in to help him!"

"By the Lord!" cried Tyson, and started forward.

In a sudden impulse of fear she caught at his elbow.

"No, let's wait a few minutes, and see. There's nothing you could do alone if he's overcome with the gas. You couldn't drag out Garth."

Tyson drew out his watch.

"We'll give him ten minutes," he said quietly, "and then we'll go in after him. Here come some white men."

He put back the watch. "So Garth went in after some peon? He's about nine-tenths man, eh?"

"He's all man!" she said eagerly.

"Vulgar sort," nodded Tyson, "but at a time like this he's the kind that's needed. You stayed with them last night?"

"Yes. Is the time up, Hal?"

"Not for five minutes. Don't lose your head, Margaret. By the way, going to the hotel to-day?"

"No," she answered. "They've asked me to stay on with them—and I intend to."

"Really?" He looked at her in astonishment, and then chuckled.

"Well, it 'll be an amusing experience—living with the Garths. Well, it 'll do you good, Margaret. Ordinarily, one doesn't get to know such people."

She looked at him, half angry, half surprised. His view-point had been her view-point of an hour before. But now she had forgotten it. She had seen Garth in action, and the picture blotted out everything else.

Tyson looked at his watch again, and then called to a few of the white men who had just come up. They consulted briefly, and half a dozen volunteers signified their willingness to go in when the ten minutes should have elapsed.

But before that time came, there was a stir in the tunnel, and then the sound of footsteps. With a rush, white men and peons poured into the cavern; there was a shout; they came out again bearing a limp body in their arms, followed by Garth.

His face was lined and white; he looked like one who has labored without sleep for a great length of time, and his eyes stared idly about him.

Yet he shook off the arms of those who would have supported him.

"Look to that poor devil," he said. "Found him lying on his face. Air's fresher close to the ground, of course, and he may be alive still. Nasty stuff, that gas."

That was all. His own lungs must have been full of the keen poison, but he had not a word for that. He stood by, watching the men work under the direction of Margaret, working the arms and legs of the stricken peon to clear his lungs of the poison and bring in the fresh air.

And eventually one eye flickered open, and then another. His brother peons, who had not lifted a hand to save him, now shouted with rejoicing. He was lifted to a sitting posture, and grinned vacuously around upon the group.

Then a hand touched the shoulder of Margaret. It was Garth.

"Better get out of this now," he said calmly. "The fellow will have his senses back in a moment, and he'll begin to thank you. Their gratitude sticks like a leech. A man can't get away from it. I know!"

She followed him, mute, back to the automobile. And as they started off, she caught the quizzical eye of Hal Tyson following them. Let Hal feel what he might, she thought, she had found a man, and she was going to know him better before she was done.

There was very little talk as they jogged back. He was driving with ludicrous caution, now, giving every bump a wide leeway, and only breathing a little deeply to clear the last vestige of the gas from his lungs. But not a word about what he had done.

The thought came to her that his past must have been filled with a thousand things like this; and he had accepted them as a part of his work.

When at last he began to speak, it was of the things they passed; and then, when they caught a vista of the desert over La Blanca, it was of the work on the canals. She heard, and she wondered. She had read of simplicity such as this, but she had never seen it.

When they came back to the house Mrs. Garth met them at the door with a single, anxious glance at her son to make out that all was well with him; Margaret started up toward her room.

"Wait a minute," called Garth after her, "we haven't finished breakfast."

She paused, and stared at him.

"And," he continued, "I've had enough exercise to give me an appetite."

She followed him back to the dining-room, and there he sat down, still with his sleeves rolled up, his hair blown stiffly awry, coatless, his elbows resting on the edge of the table, and his cuffs flopping unkemptly about them; yet he was perfectly unconscious. Perfectly at ease.

She felt, oddly, that the chains had been struck away, and now the lion was free once more. Put him in clothes of formal perfection, and he would be tongue-tied and miserable again. And she was glad with all her heart that she was sitting opposite a host who looked like a hired hand on a farm—and a rough farm at that! He was looking frankly across at her.

"Coming back to that hotel proposition," he began, a little uneasily.

"If you'll allow me to change my mind," said Margaret Tyson, "I'd like very much to stay on here with you—if it won't put too much extra care on the shoulders of your mother."

"If it does," cried Garth, exultant, "I'll give her a hand myself."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE PADRE INTERVENES.

TYSON had not fasted long enough to devitalize his body; his time of storm had been rather like the drying-out process which fits the athlete for the struggle. In twenty-four hours he was a new man; in forty-eight he could lift the world.

A great joyousness possessed him, a friendliness all-embracing. But though he smiled on the Mexicans, they regarded him warily, for they still feared him not a little.

They were used to scorn and contempt from the white men of the Southwest. They were used to treatment such as befits a subject race of inferior mentality. To Tyson, their skins alone were brown; and they responded as children respond to the unexpected kindness of the stranger, at first with dark suspicion and aloofness, and then a sudden and wholehearted surrender.

If he had been a politician campaigning for their votes, he could not have taken half so true a course to win them. Already the rumor spread. He was indeed a gringo, but he was a gringo with a difference.

So the whistle sounded the end of this day, and Tyson swung lightly down the slope toward La Blanca. None of the Mexicans offered to accompany him. They would have been glad to do so, but he never thought of inviting them, and without such an invitation they could not go with a gringo. In truth, there was a little atmosphere surrounding Tyson which served to keep them at a proper distance.

He was humming to himself when he entered the town by his accustomed route, and still humming when, by the square, he was stopped by a hail from the side. He found himself looking down into the pale, ugly face of the little *padre*.

The *padre* was smiling as he looked at

Henry Tyson, a faint smile, as though the joyousness of golden youth struck a dim reflection in his quiet heart. Somehow, that expression exaggerated the sense of suffering which the man bore about him. And the single deep wrinkle which cleft his forehead gave a touch of the wistful to his glance as it rested upon Tyson.

"This is a pleasure, *señor*," said the *padre*, in his formal, careful English, with its delightful taint of the foreign accent, "which I have been promising myself since we first met. I hoped I should see you again, *señor*, that we might come to know one another better."

Tyson was shaking the cold, small, claw-like hand.

"That's good of you," he nodded. "Won't you come up to my room for a talk?"

"I must go back to the mission," sighed the *padre*. "I am expected there. Will you walk with me? A part of the way?"

"I'm hungry as a wolf, *padre*," said Tyson, "but I'm glad to go. Eating can wait."

The *padre* looked up to him, and then shook his head. It had been long since food meant as much to him as it did to Tyson.

He sighed as the youth turned again, and went up the street at his side.

As they walked along, the peons in passing raised their sombreros to the *padre*, and bowed their heads; but always, just before they passed, their eyes flashed up and their teeth glinted over a smile as they hailed El Oro. Truly, his doings in the cement house had passed the rounds, and the tale of his gambling against Señor Kennedy rounded out the story.

The *padre* took heed of these greetings in silence for a time. He talked of the people they met, and he spoke of the buildings; he told little anecdotes of the families in the town. He reverted, now and again, with a touch of awe, to the labors of the great engineer who had built all these things in the desert.

But at last he said: "You know my people, Señor Tyson!"

"The Mexicans?" answered Tyson, surprised. "A fine, simple-minded lot. Yes, I like them very much."

"Truly?" echoed the *padre*. "Well, my friend, a little kindness goes a long way with them."

He considered his own thought for a time, nodding his head, and casting little side glances at Tyson. Very plainly he could not quite make out the young American, though he was concentrating, for some reason, upon the problem.

So they began to cut up the valley of the Chihuah, the *padre* lengthening his stride until it extended even Tyson to keep pace with him.

Watching the swishing robe and the steady, plodding gait of his companion, and the bended, thoughtful head, Tyson began to feel oddly as though he were walking back not only through distance of paces, but through distance of time into the days when the mission of San Vicente was first established in the valley of the Chihuah.

The *padre* told him little stories of these early days, and as they went along he talked enough for Tyson to patch together a more or less broken history of the mission and its work.

They had been hard days for the fathers.

In the first place, the men who established San Vicente had not been taken from old Mexico itself. They were men brought directly from Spain, and therefore they had been ignorant of the ways of the Indians and all methods of approaching them. Which was worse than putting a pedestrian for the first time on the back of a wild mustang and expecting the unfortunate to stick there.

For the flock in the Chihuah were not the peaceable natives who had made the California mission rich, for instance. The Indians of the Chihuah were the fiercest warriors on the continent, the savage Comanches, wild as the horses they rode, with tempers as restless as their knives. Yet the patient Franciscans had kept true to their task, and gained slowly in power.

Warriors who came home crippled from distant raids were nursed back to health, and these formed the nucleus of the converts. The neighboring Apaches looked upon the mission of San Vicente as a shelter and stronghold for their natural enemies, and twice the mission had been stormed and

its gardens watered with blood by the onslaught of these cunning savages.

Until one Brother Manuel, "a gentle and pious man," so the quaint old story ran, "took thought with himself and gained from his superior the permission and gathered men, both Spaniards and converts and others, for his crusade; and he went on a far journey, and he struck the Apaches both with sword and fire and humbled them; and he brought back captives in chains and won them to Christ, and they labored much in the gardens of the mission."

Thereafter, the fame of San Vicente went abroad among the Comanches, and San Vicente became, in a way, their national mission. However, the good brothers were always much troubled, because they could never be sure that their converts were praying to the gentle San Vicente in his true character, or to another San Vicente of their own making—a god of war!

And the stalwart El Toro might well have been one of those grim Comanches of the early days, tireless on the warpath, immune from fatigue, alert as the arrow that quivers on the bow-string. No wonder that Henry Tyson felt as if every step he made carried him deeper into the heart of the old days, when the first mystery was not yet torn from the New World, and God seemed, somehow, closer to the earth and the eyes of men.

The valley narrowed swiftly, they climbed up a brief rise, and in the center of the hollow which lay before him stood the Mission of San Vicente. Of the lordly rectangle which had once comprised the group of buildings with the garden in the center, three sides were broken quite away. Only one face remained, the church and the cloisters.

As for the rest, it was mostly a shapeless ruin, with here and there a section of 'dobe wall standing sharply up; but the church and the cloisters seemed at first glance, at least, fairly well preserved. If age and ill-care had dimmed the purity of the walls, yet beside the tawny waters of the Chiluah the mission was clean and white, and the bell-tower curved proudly into the blue of the sky.

These details Tyson was able to observe,

for the *padre* at the crest of the hill paused a single instant, tightened his belt, and then went down the slight descent toward the mission at a somewhat gentler pace.

As they drew nearer Tyson saw more and more clearly that the first impression of solidity was an effect of distance only, for at close hand there were visible a hundred symptoms of decay. A deep veranda skirted the front of the cloister, and the pillars which supported the roof had molded at the edges and were fast passing from square to bluntly hexagonal, and the long roof sagged miserably in the center, and in the thick walls he perceived more than one fissure, caused by earthquakes, no doubt; one in particular which ran a jagged course on the oblique across the whole face of the wall.

It made Tyson think of the one-horse shay; it might drop into dust at some sudden shock.

Now he stood in the veranda itself. It was paved with great flag-stones, and these were worn deeply toward the center by the shuffling of whole centuries of sandaled and of moccasined feet.

The *padre* paused before the open door, and then pointed an arm into the dusky interior. Tyson entered, and slowly removed his hat. For a dim atmosphere of sanctity, or that of age which is the nearest approach to sanctity, met him at the door.

He saw some chairs of antique make, painted a dull-green, and there were pictures on the wall of Brothers of the Order of St. Francis, and he breathed the air of cleanness and coolness as if the place had just been freshly washed out.

On a wall hung a picture of one of the old brothers seated at a table with a book between his hands—and there stood the very table, and on it was the very book. Tyson turned to the *padre*.

He was quite old, perhaps, but there was about him that mysterious connotation of youth which clings to so many of the monastic orders—that suggestion of men who have not lived past the first enthusiasm of youth. There was not a line on his face except that deep, perpendicular wrinkle in the center of his forehead which gave to his entire expression a touch of wistfulness.

"You were good to come," said the *padre*. "Are you tired?"

"You stole the distance away with your talk," smiled Tyson.

"Ah," he nodded. "The time was when I could have walked with you, but time has put heavy boots upon me. Well—"

His brown hand waved slowly, a gesture of profound resignation.

"You must come out to the garden with me," he said, "and we will sit in the cool while you recover your breath. This way, if you please."

And he led Tyson through a massive arch on the farther side of the room, down a brief passage, and into the open.

"At least, this was once the burial-ground, and some little care of the graves is all my strength permits; so here is all my garden. Do you mind so gloomy a place to sit?"

He spoke slowly, in careful English, but the soft Spanish ran, somehow, behind his English words. A throng of old tombstones filled the space, which was bounded on the three other sides by sagging heaps of ruins, and close to the wall of the cloister were two stone chairs; they had stood there moldering for centuries, perhaps; six inches of the stout legs were sunk into the ground. Here they sat down.

"Is there only you to take care of all this?" asked Tyson.

"I am the last," nodded Padre Miguel. "Our flock is wasted away; there is little to do except with hoe and spade and rake. And even for that I am a little old."

And he smiled deprecatingly on Tyson. The latter removed his hat, for they sat in the steep shadow of the wall, and so doing he felt the eyes of the *padre* shift quickly up to his golden hair and rest there. Not long or boldly; it was only a lingering glance of curiosity.

"And yet," argued Tyson, "are not those new graves—there—and there—and there?"

"Oh, yes. They are the bodies of men who died at the dam. Many of them come here; the Mexican loves the old, you know. It is a long walk, but some of them come here for confession when they are deeply troubled. And when these poor fellows died

their last request was that they be buried here in the shadow of dear San Vicente. I was sorry, but their last prayers must be heeded."

"Sorry?" queried Tyson.

"For all these stones and all these graves will be lost soon enough, *señor*. When the dam is finished and the waters rise—that will be soon now—all the mission will be quickly covered. And that will be the last of San Vicente."

His quiet eyes grew misty; he sighed.

"It is not a brave place, *señor*; but even a prisoner will come to love his chains. One of your own poets has said it. Well, there will be many a sad heart among those workers at the dam when the waters rise over the bell-tower. I could wish that just that could be spared."

"It is sure to be covered?" asked Tyson, and he peered at the old *padre*.

"You are excited, my son," replied the other, smiling. "But yes, San Vicente has softened many a heart. He has worked great works here within these walls of mud. But there is a period that all things reach, and every sentence has its end. And so—His will be done."

The head of the *padre* bowed, and Tyson knew that he prayed silently.

"There will be excitement at the dam when the mission is covered with the water," he mused.

"For you see," explained the *padre*, "they look on it, in a way, as a sacrilege, and it is all that I can do to keep them to their work, a great many of them. They are like children, you see, and the whisper goes to and fro among them, and they shake their heads and say that no good thing will come from drowning San Vicente."

"It would not take much to rouse them to action, I suppose," brooded Henry Tyson.

"Only a leader. But I have brought you here for a purpose, *señor*, and you will weary when an old man talks so much to so little purpose."

"*Padre*," answered Tyson, with strange feeling, "I would have walked thrice as far to learn what you have told me." He looked on down the valley, and frowned at the blunt, looming top of the dam. "Aye,

ten times as far." Then, settling back and lighting a cigarette: "But let me hear why you have brought me, if you wish."

"She spoke the truth," nodded the *padre* gravely. "You are not like others. I am the more troubled because that is true. Do you guess why I have sent for you?"

"There is only one possible reason. It is the girl. It is Rona Carnahan? She is almost the only person who knows both you and me."

"I am troubled because of her," said the *padre*, and his clear eyes dwelt steadily on Tyson. "And you have troubled me, *señor*."

"I shall wager any agreeable sum," smiled Tyson, "that I have troubled you less than she has troubled me."

"I know, I know!" said the *padre* rather hastily. "But let us be quiet and think before we speak. I do not wish to rush into words and offend you, *señor*."

And they sat in the silence. It was like the body of music to which the gentle voice of the *padre* had been the prelude. The shadows slid steadily, quietly across the ground. The moss of the stones breathed its damp, cool atmosphere around the mind of Tyson; he could have believed that by closing his eyes he would awaken in the seventeenth century.

He rallied himself with an effort.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### CONCERNING TRUTH.

"**S**HALL I speak what I imagine?" he said at last. "You fear that I have seen too much of the girl."

"Well?" queried the old man. It was like the clash of a metallic will against Tyson's mind, that short, sharp word.

"My dear *padre*," chuckled Tyson, "she is a child."

"You will not be angry. I fear this talk, but since I saw that my people love you, I know that you are right at heart. Rona is not a child. She is old enough to ride a horse, run like a man, sing like a bird—and love like a woman."

A little flush sprang up in Tyson's cheek. He had not thought of the girl seriously,

but the good *padre*, unknowingly, was bringing new ideas and riveting them home in the mind of Tyson. He felt now a sense of guilt which had not been with him the moment before.

"I am frank, you see," he said. "I understand you. But Rona will be married within a few days."

"It is an empty promise which is making her marry, *señor*."

"Padre Miguel," said Tyson sharply, "do you approve of this fellow Kennedy? Have you given him your support with that unsophisticated girl?"

"He is not a very good man," admitted the *padre*, "but neither is he very bad. He is a simple man, *señor*, and the simple heart may always be saved."

"Padre," smiled Tyson, "you place a great trust in him."

"The priest changed color a little, but he answered with dignity. "You are not simple, *señor*. You are youth, and youth is terrible and cruel. You are never still; your blood is fire. And Rona is tinder which a long summer has fired for flame."

"Do you know," murmured Tyson, "that the last time I was with that girl only the ringing of your bell up here saved me from her knife?"

"I know everything which has passed between you," answered the old man, "and it was not until she told me that she had drawn the knife that I began to worry about Rona."

"I'm afraid you have studied more books than women, *padre*. Is it not so?"

Padre Miguel Vega laid his brown hand on the arm of Tyson.

"I am very serious, *señor*."

Tyson could not reply. He felt guilty, of what he knew not.

"Tell me shortly: what is the girl to you?"

Tyson looked inward. "I do not know."

"The fiend," said the *padre*, "works in the dark."

"Come, come! The girl is to be married. Do you think that I have the power to forbid the bans?"

"Would it cost you much," pursued Padre Miguel earnestly, "to give me your word to see Rona no more?"

"My word," said Tyson, "is something which I can neither give easily nor easily retract."

There was a silence between them, and the steep shadow lengthened from the moldering wall.

"I am going to tell you a story," said Padre Miguel. "It is because she is strange that you hunt her out. She is not beautiful—very. And what could she be in your life? Only an—experience."

Tyson caught the sound of gritted teeth.

"You are not of her order, *señor*. What you are I cannot tell. You bear the marks of a laboring man, but your eye is not the eye of one who labors. I had a wolfhound once which was fleet and fiercer, I think, than any living thing."

Here he turned and looked full into the eyes of Tyson. He continued after that enigmatic glance: "But it must be because she is strange to you that you follow her. I will make you know her as I know her. I am sure that is best."

"It was many years ago. El Toro himself was only a boy at the mission then—and a troublesome boy, I warrant you. It was the spring of the year, and in the spring the Chihuahua is a pleasant place, silent and green. Travelers have come up the valley at that season, following the river-road, and in this spring of which I tell you the father and the mother of Rona came up the river-road. They camped among the trees—just over that hill, *señor*."

"It was plain that they would soon have a child. Indeed, it was for the sake of the child that they came here. For the wife was not well, and her doctor had sent her away from the city to find quiet. About her you must understand, *señor*, that Mr. Carnahan was a violinist famous in three countries, and that while he was touring through Italy he met this girl, and they were married."

"And it seemed to me that she was like her husband's violin. In tune, she was most pleasant, but out of tune she was very different. And you know, *señor*, that it needs but little to make a violin out of tune. It was the same with the young wife. The promise of the child upset her terribly; she could not live in the city; so before the

birth the doctor sent her out to find the peace of the desert.

"They were strangely close to one another, this man and his wife. I would visit them in their cabin and watch them with my heart in my throat. For hours, *señor*, he played his violin, and her eyes dwelt on his face and drank the music, until sometimes it seemed to me that the music was the food on which the young life within her lived."

"So the wife grew stronger and gayer, and the rose came under the olive of her skin, and there was a light in her eyes—a wonderful thing to see."

The *padre* paused and smiled out to the growing blueness of the hills with the black shadow of the dam between them.

He said again: "To me, *señor*, it often seems that the Virgin is incarnate in every wife before her motherhood; the Holy Spirit broods within them."

"There was one shadow in the cabin of the Carnahans. He drank much, as some artists will. The burden of his wife's health and the happiness of both lay on his shoulders and bowed him with the weight, and he looked to drink for help. *Señor*, I have seen him playing to his wife with the red madness in his eyes, and her the still, white light. Is it any wonder that my heart would come beating in my throat. The Annunciation, with the voice of Satan speaking; the fiend struggling toward a divine work."

"But one day he had no more to drink. He came to us for help. Alas! we had nothing to give him. He came again a day later and prayed by my side, kneeling near me, for strength. But strength was denied him. Still another day, and he was gone. The violin was silent in the cabin, and the young wife was waiting with blank eyes. I myself went to her and looked into her soul."

The *padre* broke off with a faint moan; and his calloused fingers were interlaced.

"She knew as I knew why he had gone. But that did not make the waiting less terrible for her. He had gone to the nearest town, and that was a sad journey. Seven days, and now he was overdue. And on the eighth night a great storm broke. Never

have I seen such wind and rain. A wall of water eight feet high came down the Chihuahua like thunder, and the hills groaned on either side.

"In the middle of the storm I thought of her and rose and went to her in the night."

He paused, and there drove home in the silence a picture of the young *padre* bowing against the storm, and the wind wrenching at his robe, and the rain crashing about him.

"I came near the cabin, and a bough was torn from a tree above me and flung on my head."

Automatically he raised his hand. There was a jagged white scar that ran from his temple into his thick, black hair.

"After a time I roused out of my miserable trance. There was a sad voice blowing down the valley, a wail that went through me. It seemed to come from the cabin, and I thought of the devil that had lived in Carnahan's eyes, and I was afraid and turned and ran down the valley."

The brown hand of the *padre* rose and pressed against the scar, and all his face wrinkled with pain as though he felt again the torment of that distant moment, and he shivered as if the rain were beating on his sodden body once again.

"I was afraid, *señor*. And it was long before I had the strength to turn again and go back through the storm. Before I reached the cabin the wails had ceased. I opened the door!"

He could not speak for a moment, but his lips moved rapidly, and pain closed up his eyes.

"It was the voice of the woman's pain—think—which had gone out to me through the storm and turned me back. It was her own voice which had slain her. For if I had come straight on at first—no matter. When I came at last, it was too late. The child was born two months before its time, and the mother was dying—terribly.

"And in that horror, *señor*, will you believe that I thought still and always of the Holy Mother and the Child and the winter night in Bethlehem? Blasphemy?

"She knew that she was dying, but she did not cling to me and beg for life. She

did not speak a word, but her look went ever from the child to my face, and to and fro and back again. And the child looked at us both with its red, wrinkled, ancient eyes.

"Well, it would have been strange if the mother had lived; it was a miracle that the child did not die. We took it to the mission and cared for it, and the next day Carnahan came back.

"It was then that I was punished with a mortal sin. Consider, *amigo mío*, that I had sometimes looked on the young wife and had remembered that San Vicente must take all the place of woman in my life. And this led me to my mortal sin, for when Carnahan came back I told him all that he had done, and it took his reason from him. To this day his wits live in his violin alone. And that, *señor*, is my penance, for every day I go to hear him play and to remember the mother of Rona Carnahan. It is true!

"We buried her here—that is her grave. And whenever the moon is full Carnahan comes and plays all night at the grave the same songs he used to play to his wife when she lived.

"Now, friend, I am come to the girl. At her birth she had lost both father and mother, and she got two foster parents—a *padre* for one, and for the other, the Indian, El Toro. How he came to her is another story.

"But you will see that God and the devil both had parts in her birth, and she has lived her life under El Toro on the one part, and under the *padre* on the other. So I say to you, *señor*, that there is a day and a night to her nature—a smile and a blasphemy on her lips—a rose and a dagger in her hand.

"Señor Tyson, she is so simple that she hates the dam and all things connected with it because she knows that the water it backs up will cover the grave of her mother. All her life she has come every day to this grave—you see it there? And she has sat singing. And in her childhood she used to talk to her dead mother.

"Now, the coming of the water is more terrible to her than a second death. Yes, she would give her body and soul to the

man who could stop the building of that dam. You see what a child she is? And to you, *señor*, what could she ever be more than a toy?"

Tyson rose in anger, but the *padre* rose also and dropped his hands on the shoulders of the young man.

"Think, my son," he urged gently.

"I shall give you my word," said Tyson, flushing, "that before this moment I never thought seriously of the girl. And now—"

"Ah—now?"

"It is a crime that so rare and genuine a nature should go to Kennedy—one of the canaille!"

"And you, *señor*, what would you do with her?"

"You speak, sir"—this with rising irritation—"as if that wild woman were in the hollow of my hand."

"No. I only fear. I appeal to your honor."

"Honor," said Tyson coldly, "cannot go in leading strings."

"Ah, my son," murmured the *padre* sadly. "You are filled with double purposes, and I only follow the shadow of your mind. Beware! Beware of pride! To-day I feel you are clean of body and mind. But to-morrow you may be viler than the leper. God Himself could hardly cleanse you. Pride, my son, it is a canker that eats the heart of a man. To-day you feel yourself a proven man. To-morrow your pride may be hurt, and when it is touched you may become a wolf, tearing all things around you."

Tyson frowned impatiently, and the *padre* lifted his hand for silence. A light, sweet whistling, like that of a strong songster flying up the wind, came to them over the wall of the cemetery.

"It is she!" muttered Tyson.

"And your face lights with danger," said the *padre* gloomily. "Alas! my son, I fear there were no evil thoughts in your mind before I put them there to-day. Our Father forgive me if it is true. And so you will give me no promises?"

"Padre Miguel," said Tyson, his voice hard, "you are not young."

"It is true," said the *padre*, and smiled calmly into the angry face of the youth.

"I am going to meet her," said Tyson.

"Ah?" said the *padre*.

"And I shall try to act always as a man of honor should act. Does that please you, sir?"

The *padre* made a singular gesture of resignation.

"The wind pleases me and the calm also," he said softly; "the drought and the rain as well. The will of our Father is all."

Tyson whirled on his heel and stalked away, but the Padre Miguel followed the retreating form with the same undecipheral smile.

Afterward he resumed his place in the stone chair and remained for a long time gazing down the valley, where the blues of the evening climbed the sides of Cabeza and Blanca, though rosy light still rested on their heads.

"It is true," said the *padre*, and he spoke softly in the solitude. "I am no longer young."

A faint echo nodded gently back to him from the ancient wall.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### PRIDE WASHES CLEAN.

AS for Tyson, he swung down the valley at a rapid pace. Expectancy put a spring in his step, expectancy of what he could not know.

The good father had worked quite the opposite of what he hoped. For the life of Tyson had been singularly clean, strangely free of the usual faults of men of his own leisure class; the companionship of Margaret had been an antidote for the atmosphere of sin in which so much of his life had been spent.

Rona had been to him only a diversion, an oddity, with just a touch of novelty and beauty besides. But he would probably have seen her a thousand times in full innocence.

The pride of caste held him in bands of iron. All the world he admitted to his acquaintance. The brown, simple Mexicans, rough-handed Garth, they were all free to occupy his ear and receive his

thoughts. But into his intimate personal life only the elect could enter. Yet now the *padre* had planted a new thought, and such thoughts grow quickly.

For the poor *padre* had suggested that he, Tyson, had an influence over the girl, that she was interested, intensely; and Tyson felt suddenly the thrill of possession. Not that his thoughts went far. Of marriage he would as soon have thought as of leprosy; not even the thought of any affair with the girl was firmly implanted in his mind.

All Tyson knew, as he swung down the valley, was that an adventure lay before him, and he was prepared to taste the full zest of it—and retain his honor. A gentleman's honor; who has ever stopped to consider what its whitest portions are, and where pride begins and honor leaves off?

He was bearing straight for the sound of the whistling. Apparently it lay directly ahead of him down the river-path, but now the sound came to a sharp period. In a moment he passed the point where she should have been, according to the loudness of the whistling an instant before. But the path was empty both ways, and the hush of the evening lay heavily around him. There was not a trace of Rona Carnahan.

"The devil fly away with her," said Tyson angrily, and he turned his back, somewhat sullenly, upon all thought of the girl.

Yet he had hardly made a pace when a voice behind him said: "Señor Tyson, if I were a man, I should horsewhip you for that!"

He turned with an exclamation, and found her leaning against a tree, the tree which had concealed her. Her senses must have been of hair-trigger sensitiveness to have warned her of his coming in time for her to hide. She was dressed like an Indian, in a garb of freedom, more masculine than feminine, in a sleeveless buckskin jacket, wide sombrero, and short skirt. Her hair hung in two long braids, one over each shoulder, with the light twisting along them like the path of a torch down a river at night.

"You passed so close," she said, "that I could have stolen your hat."

"Why did you hide?"

"I knew you were looking for me, Señor Tyson."

He frowned at this complacency.

"You knew?"

"I saw the necktie, señor. I knew then that you had come to boast."

He removed his hat and rubbed his forehead, for he was heated by the walk.

"I have busy days ahead of me, Rona," he said, and only a short stay on the Chiluah, I fear. I have come to say good-by."

"The Chiluah will miss you," answered the girl, and covered a luxurious yawn.

"Here's a fallen tree for a seat," she went on. "Sit down and say good-by. It is easier than standing." She followed her own advice and sat down on the trunk. "Besides," she continued, "I want to hear about the fight."

"What fight?" queried Tyson, and feeling ill at ease standing there before her, he took a place at her side.

"Where did you shoot him? And will he recover?" asked the girl.

"What are you talking about?"

"Kennedy, of course."

"Fight?"

"Will he grow well again?"

"I see now. You think I fought him for the necktie?"

She started.

"Did you steal it?"

"I won it from him, gambling."

Her teeth shone.

"He did not fight a stroke for it?"

"Not yet."

She brooded.

"He looks like a man," she said, and then: "You should not have won it from me!"

He caught himself leaning close to her, and recovered with a start. What he thought of then was the pale, pure face of Margaret; and then he felt this new sense of guilt. He held out his hand. "It may be long before I see you again. Good-by, Rona."

If the *padre* could have seen that, how his heart would have leaped, surely. The renunciation!

But she paid no attention. "You have just left the *padre*?"

"Yes."

"I told you he would send you away. Did he frighten you?"

"Frighten me?"

She smiled. "The big man will deny that *you* frightened *him*."

"You've a poisonous tongue," he answered angrily. Then he mastered his irritation and extended his hand again.

"I'm in a hurry," he said. "It's late, Rona, and I have a long distance to walk."

She took his hand and retained it in a steady clasp.

"I don't want you to go," she asserted. "I will tell Padre Miguel that, and perhaps he will let you stay."

"He has nothing at all to do with my going," said Tyson in a louder voice.

"Yet you are going, *señor*."

"Why should I stay?"

"Because you like me."

"You will marry Kennedy and be happy ever after; so busy plaguing him that you'll forget me, eh?"

"I shall not marry him," she said earnestly, "if that is sending you away."

He turned to face her squarely, and he searched her as a strong light plumbs the darkness, but he could not read a thing within her.

"You have promised him," he said.

"A promise is a word, and a word is a breath." She inhaled slowly. "So, I take back the promise with the breath. Is it not true?"

"Padre Miguel will have another opinion," smiled Tyson, "and so will poor Kennedy."

"However," she insisted, "I will not let either of them hurt you."

"Dear God!" burst out the man. "Do you dream that I'm running away because I fear an old priest and a bull-throated gambler?"

"Of course," answered Rona Carnahan, "they cannot hear you now. I am glad of that."

It needs a rare man to bear the imputation of cowardice from the lips of any woman; and Tyson was worried. For the first time he regarded Rona seriously, because for the first time she had seriously disturbed him. She had passed into sudden

change as the moon dips behind a cloud and leaves the skies dark with midnight. She sat with an elbow on her knee, and her chin resting on a clenched fist, and her eyes probing a gloomy distance—like a feminine "Thinker."

"What shall I do," asked Tyson, "to prove that I'm not afraid of them?"

She did not answer.

"Yet I haven't time to waste on the *padre* and the gambler," he concluded, rising, "so it's good-by, Rona."

She paid no heed to his extended arm, and Tyson frowned.

"Good-by," he repeated. "I'm sorry to leave you in anger, Rona."

"You will come back," she said, and was silent again.

He stared after her, but found an expression which he could not decipher. Perhaps there is nothing that makes a man so uncomfortable as silence in a woman; for her natural weapons are grace of body and music of voice and the charm of small, speaking ways; but when she is silent the deadly weapon of thought takes the place of all these.

It is puzzling, as a boxer is puzzling who keeps his right hand extended instead of the left. It is difficult to explain the peculiar and insinuating power of silence; perhaps it is that we endow the silent one with strength from our own imaginings.

At any rate, it became extremely difficult for Tyson to meet the solemn eyes of Rona. It was as if the girl were judging him, and reading his values with a pitiless accuracy. It was not long—that pause—but while it lasted Tyson forgot the lessening light, and the swift trees, and the blue hills on either side, and he saw only the large, dark, thoughtful eyes of the girl. There was no place for words. What meaning could words have to her?

He turned on his heel and strode down the valley. The atmosphere of thoughtfulness which she had established stayed with him. He was picturing her in a thousand attitudes, critically, and remembering that in none of them had she been beautiful.

Yet the impression she gave was that of beauty; he tasted the thought of it, and being a connoisseur, he knew; it was like

seeing the sun through a smoked glass—it did not look like the sun, but he knew that the brilliance was there.

There were other puzzling things about her. Not the least of these was that at this moment he did not feel as if he had left her forever; there was none of that definite sense of oblivion which a final parting brings.

It shot home to him that that might have been what the girl was thinking when she sat there with her chin on her fist, studying him. Was it calm confidence that he would return? The idea brought him to a sharp stop, and, throwing back his head, he laughed shortly.

So doing, his eyes fell upon the heights of La Cabeza, and there he saw, indistinctly, lost in shadows, a mighty face.

He closed his eyes, he rubbed them, and stared again; the face was gone. For a moment he felt a vast relief; the thing must have been a mirage. He studied the top

of the mountain. The last light of the day played dimly across the crags, burying one prominence in darkness and lifting out another, as a worker with charcoal uses the broad, soft end of his stick and changes his composition with strong, slow strokes.

Yet a moment of thought brought back the disturbance. In spite of the fact that he could not find it again, the features of the face remained clean-cut in his mind; or, rather, the featurelessness of the face. It had been like one of those antique sphinxes of Egypt, with nose and eyes and lips and chin obliterated by time; yet the impression of the face is only the sharper for the ruin.

A smiling face—a mocking smile. With an uneasy spirit Tyson circled the heights of the dam, and swung down toward La Blanca. Superstitions do not rest easily on the twentieth century mind, and it was little wonder that Tyson walked with his eyes upon the ground.

**This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**



# The Ghost

by Max Brand

**H**ER name was Valerie Eloise St. Vincent and she married John Smith. The names tell the story, but it may be expanded.

Valerie St. Vincent was a masterpiece; like a Greek tragedy or a Chopin prelude she gave that classic feeling of complete-

ness—which means that every detail of her was finished. Every one has seen beautiful French women with large ankles, and beautiful English women who become flabby at thirty, and beautiful American women with bony hands, but Valerie St. Vincent was perfect. Her manicurist, for instance,

said that her finger-nails had a natural lustre; and when she wore evening dress there was that curve which in our dreams we see running from finger-tips to shoulders and throat and chin; and there were her arms, impossible of description, for they were that peculiar rounded sort which are lithe without being sharp at the elbows. You felt the curves of her body through her clothes. Her hair was that accurate blue-black which has lustre without metallic gloss, and there were masses and masses of it, incredibly silky and fine. Her eyebrows were the rare, slim, unfaltering lines which could truly be called penciled; and the eyes beneath them were a deep blue continually varying as the sky varies between evening and night.

Such was Valerie St. Vincent.

When she came out of course Mrs. Gregory Sloan looked her over, carefully, for the whole evening. Mrs. Gregory Sloan never made mistakes, and therefore Valerie's mother was on pins and needles until she heard the judgment.

"My dear," said Mrs. Gregory Sloan, "Valerie will be a tremendous success. She belongs to the first class."

"And that?" asked Valerie's mother.

"Of course you know there are three classes," smiled Mrs. Gregory Sloan. "There are women who are wooed, women who have been wooed, and women who might have been wooed. Valerie is like you, my dear!"

At which Mrs. St. Vincent flushed in her own delightful way and disappeared into a crowd—of men.

The rush to get Valerie, which began that night, lasted three seasons and was of historic density throughout. The first season she threw away a title; the second season she laughed at a hundred millions; the third season—

Well, in the third season two men stood out above the crowd, and they were Lloyd Gandil Maury and George Swain Van Siebert 2nd. They both had enough money, family, and all that sort of thing, though there had been others far better equipped in all respects than these two; but by this time it was apparent that Valerie was out for a man, not for the

trimmings which may surround a man. As the vulgar phrased it, Valerie was not hunting for a letterhead. So in the third season these two splendid fellows were running neck and neck, and even Valerie could not help but show her partiality toward them. Toward the spring she went up into the mountains, and every one said: "When she comes down she'll have made up her mind." They were perfectly right. When she came down from the mountains she had made up her mind; she was married; and she was married to John Smith.

People naturally gasped at first, but society is much more tolerant than we are told in the Sunday papers, and now society said nothing, but sat down to await developments. By a little rumaging about in the past it learned that John Smith was worth a few millions in Western copper stocks and it also learned that he had been a football-player in college. That was promising. Here was the young Lochinvar come out of the West with big hands and a square jaw and eyes of fire—a self-made millionaire, a hero of many a battle on the gridiron, a man who did things and who would sweep Valerie along to Rockefellerian heights. So society stepped out and met John Smith half-way. It smiled upon him cordially, it took him by the arm, it drew him aside, it opened the fifty-year-old Burgundy and drank to his eyes and waited for him to speak.

But John Smith did not speak. He smiled in a rather vague way. Some men are "strongly silent"; but John Smith was merely "expectantly hushed." Society shook its head, but still it refused to be disillusionized. Was it not looking upon the man who had married Valerie Eloise St. Vincent? It examined John Smith more in detail.

His hands, to be sure, were large, and so were his shoulders, but several layers of fat had gathered over his muscles since his college days, and while his chin was square enough it showed terrible tendencies toward doubling itself. Neither were his jests stale, when he told them, nor was his voice overwhelming; nor was he painfully self-conscious; nor did he wreck his dancing-partners; nor did he light cigars with bills of

large denominations; in a word, he did none of the crude things which shock society into delighted attention. And the world gradually realized the depressing truth that John Smith was exactly like his name. He was just a good-natured, kind-hearted, rather stupid, commonplace. His football days had been spent in a little Middle Western college; and, worst of all, his money had been inherited.

Mrs. Sloan, of course, gave judgment at last. She said: "He is never in the way, and on account of Valerie he will never be out of the way." Society swallowed hard and agreed with Mrs. Sloan, as usual.

But it was impossible to bury Valerie Eloise St. Vincent in the chasm of "Mrs. Smith." Nature rebelled at the boundary. She had not wrought this perfect flower in order to waste it on the desert air of social oblivion. Flowers do not bloom unseen—in the twentieth century.

Not while roses are nine dollars a dozen.

In truth, marriage did not change her in the least. She was just as accessible as ever; she was just as uncompromised by attentions; she was just as far from being monopolized; neither did she wilt. Valerie Eloise—Smith—wilt? By no means! She blossomed still more delicately. What a complexion was hers! It was not like the lily. No, but have you ever looked inside the lily at noon of a bright day and seen how the deep-yellow of the stamen is reflected and gives the rarest glow of gold to the inside of the cup? Ah, that was the complexion of Valerie which defied time!

So George Swain Van Siebert told her this day at Wandermere—that was John Smith's place up the river. They were alone on the little porch off the breakfast-room, and they were about to follow the beagles over the hills. The costume hit off Valerie in rare style—the rough colorful Tweed of the short skirt, the loose blouse with the tie making a splash of color, and the tam-o'-shanter making more color above.

"You're like the soul of the morning, Valerie," he concluded, "absolutely—like—the freshness—of the morning."

It wasn't hunting for words that made him stumble in this manner; it was the

struggle to keep himself from saying too much, and the effort made his lips tremble and his eyes bright. And she watched him with concern, her fingers fumbling in the pockets of her dress as though she were about to draw something out.

"There—the beagles are out," she said. "We mustn't keep them waiting." He stopped her with a gesture.

"I've got to see you and have a chance to talk," he said earnestly.

She said rapidly in alarm: "Pull yourself together, George; you're *letting* yourself go."

"Valerie, you cool-headed, enticing, delightful—"

"If you are heard—" she suggested.

"Then promise me a chance to talk—soon."

"I'll manage it while we're following the beagles."

He drew a long breath and then followed her out to the front of the house. There were the beagles, little, active dogs with sad eyes and sweeping ears. John Smith, his cheeks flushed by the crisp morning, held half a dozen of them in leash, and they strained futilely against his big, fleshy hands and raised the chiming chorus of the hunt. There were a dozen other guests come out for the week-end to follow the beagles and see Valerie. They stood about yawning—for the hour was early—until Valerie appeared, and then they started into life, with a smile here, a jest there, then laughter, and there was never a merrier hunt than that which scurried across the hills at Wandermere.

George Swain Van Siebert watched Valerie with a careful eye, but she showed no intention of lagging behind. In fact, she was up there at the very heels of the hounds, with the crowd clustering closely around her. So, she was putting him off again. He waited until the hunt entered a wood and there he sat down on a stump under pretence of tying a loose shoe-lace. Almost instantly the crowd was out of sight among the trees, but when he started up to go back to the house he found himself standing face to face with Valerie. Van Siebert blinked, as if the eye of an electric flashlight had suddenly glared at him.

"You're awfully impatient and just a little sullen, aren't you?" said Valerie.

He took off his cap and stood twisting it between his hands; so that the slant morning sun set fire to his hair, for it was a sort of bronze-red and curled thick and short and close to his head. Usually when Van Siebert tried to be grave he was only boyishly wistful, but now he was different—Valerie recognized the change at once.

Yet he began, lightly enough: "How in the world did you manage to get from that crowd and come back here—all in a moment?"

"I saw you were angry—and I just managed it. Sit down again and I'll take this hump of turf."

"I'd rather stand for what I have to say."

It was characteristic of Valerie that she made no attempt to evade the issue. She merely nodded, as much as to say: "I know!"

"But, after all," said Van Siebert, "there's no use in a lot of words. Only, I have to know what the end is going to be—and I have to know it now!"

She had picked up a little switch during the hunt and now she held it between her extended hands and turning it slowly.

"I'd tell you this minute, if I could."

"Is it fair to dodge?"

"You know that I never dodge. I'm merely trying to make up my mind."

"Valerie, it's desperately hard to be about you like this, month after month. I've held myself in check till my muscles ache and my head swims, and it makes me sick at heart to think of all the times I've talked to you with one eye watching for an intruder and one ear cocked to hear an approaching step. It can't go on!"

"It can't go on," she agreed. "You're growing worse every day—your eyes follow me about in such a way. Only yesterday Mrs. Redding said: 'I don't know which is the more patient, George or your husband.' Yes, if we don't come to a decision we'll come to a scandal. Every one is beginning to watch; they're hungry to make misconstructions. John is the only one who sees nothing. Can't you give me a little more time?"

"Time?" cried Van Siebert. "My God, Valerie! Can't you say yes or no? Take me or send me away!"

"I don't want to send you away, but the other thing—give me a little more time. I've never been the sort to jump to conclusions. You know that."

"But this will run on forever, and every day is a distinct and separate hell for me. I can't stand it!"

"It's as hard for me as it is for you. Whenever you're near me I'm in a panic and it seems to me that some one is bound to see. When you shake hands it's ages before you let my fingers go, and even then your eyes follow me and take hold of me and possess me. George, you throw your attentions around me."

He stepped closer to her and looked down into her face, for he was a big fellow of the build which has weight without heavy-footedness, and now he stood poised and eager as a young crusader ready for battle.

"I don't know what keeps me from it, Valerie," he said in a low voice.

"Your fine gentleness," she answered.

"Do you think it's that? Last night I couldn't sleep, so I got up and sat before the window. The sky was very dark, but after a time I could make out the dark, pointed tops of the trees wavering against it and I could hear the wind going through the branches like a far-off sea. That sounds—mushy—like poetry, eh? But I didn't feel that way. I wanted to have you somewhere out in that forest where I could break the damned chain of convention that keeps you here at Wandermere, unhappy."

"But I'm not unhappy. I suppose I should be, but somehow it's impossible for me to be unhappy long. Just when I'm about to become properly blue and think about life and death and such things, I'm sure to hear some one laugh, or see how yellow the sunshine is—and then away I go and forget everything."

"Valerie—oh, confound it!"

"Me, you mean."

But her smile seemed to spur him. He gave a little sharp cry and caught her close to him. He pressed her head against his shoulder and kissed her.

"Valerie, dear, my dearest, do you care? Are you afraid?"

"No."

"Because you love me!"

"No, because I don't!"

He freed her with a groan and struck the back of his hand across his eyes, as if he tried to clear his vision.

"Do you want me to lie to you, George?"

"No—yes—I don't care whether it's true or not. I only want you to say you care for me."

"You know that I like you tremendously. I'd rather be with you than with any one."

"Damn the liking! It isn't that I want. Valerie, you stone-hearted, beautiful image of a woman, haven't you ever been touched by that feeling of emptiness that grows stronger when you're with the person you love; and a pain that grows in you till your eyes are misty?"

"It's somewhere between homesickness and seasickness, isn't it?"

He stiffened a little.

"Don't you see?" she said quickly.

"It's because I *do* know what it is that I tell you I won't go with you."

"Who was the man? John Smith?"

"Don't be ironical. He was the man. You see, if this love that you talk about so much is to live, it has to be an exchange. It can't come entirely from one side. I *know*. Just before we were married and just after, it was the real thing. I loved him; he loved me; and that changed the world. To see him was happiness—that sharp kind with the hurt in it. I was so happy that the tears used to come into my eyes."

She paused, and then glanced slowly toward Van Siebert with a rather twisted smile.

"It didn't last long. It went out in me, suddenly, one day, as a wind will snuff a candle; and ever since I've been like some one in the dark. But John still cares for me; he lives with the great illusion. No, I don't pretend with him, any more, but he takes me for granted and he's happy as I used to be. Do you think I could rob him of that? I'd rather commit murder! When the thing dies in him—then I'll go and we'll try the big adventure to-

gether. It won't be the old star-stored joy, but at least I could never be weary life with you."

Van Siebert was afire.

"You're waiting for it to die in him? Good heavens, Valerie, don't you know that it's been dead in him these many long months?"

"That isn't the white sort of fib, George."

"Come, come, Valerie, you know I wouldn't misrepresent. I'll tell you exactly what I know. Gad! to think that you've been blind to it! Well it was a good month ago that I walked in on John in the library. I had on a pair of English walking-shoes—the rubber-soled kind, you know—and I suppose I didn't make much sound. He was half turned away from me, with his head resting on one hand and the fingers digging into his hair, and I heard him sigh. When I stepped closer I saw that he held a picture on his knee, and it was a girl's face—"

There was a joyous cry from Valerie.

"It's true! It's true! It's true!" she said. "Those absent-minded moods of his lately! Wasn't I blind not to guess! Dear old John, I know he'll be happy with her. Still—it may not have meant anything."

"But it did, most certainly," urged Van Siebert. "When he saw me he caught up the picture and slipped it back into his breast pocket. And then I saw the picture was in that old pigskin case which he carries about with him always—you know the one?"

"Yes, yes! He's never without it!"

"Also he tried to cover his embarrassment by making conversation; and you know that's rare in John."

"Think of it! Here I've been torturing myself to keep from hurting John; and John has been in misery to keep from hurting me, and all the time—" She broke off into a merry laughter.

"Then you'll go?" cried Van Siebert, though his voice lowered to a stealthy murmur.

"Go? Yes, now, this moment! Go? Will a prisoner go from a prison? Go? I've only to slip the leash, George, and I could love you with all my heart. I've

known it, but I've fought to keep away from it. I've only to take a single step—see!—and you can be all the world to me!"

She was in his arms again as she spoke, clinging, and a tremor underlay her voice like the quiver of the harp-string long after it has been plucked—an undercurrent of music. Van Sibert shook like a leaf.

"Valerie, oh, my dear," he murmured to her, "you've been like a lovely flower—a cut flower without life—but now there's the blossom and the perfume together, and the fragrance runs through me. Tell me—again—you love me!"

"With all my heart."

"This moment is worth all the waiting. Shall we go? Now?"

She had slipped away from him again. And her voice and her flush and her eyes—she was like a crystal-clear river that runs bright with the reflection of a gay sunset.

"Not now. It must be perfect from the start. To-night, at twelve, if you have your car waiting—"

It's a rare child that will give up even a broken toy to another without a struggle, and that evening, to the astonishment of Van Siebert, Valerie had not a glance or a word for him. She concentrated entirely on her husband. He watched the results rather anxiously, but John Smith could not have answered better if he had been coached to the purpose. He was as conversationally impregnable as a walrus on a cake of ice. The climax came when Valerie, in the drawing-room, threw open the French windows and stood in the night wind.

She called over her shoulder to her husband: "It's a ripping night, John—perfectly clear and a big yellow moon coming up through the woods. Sha'n't we jump into our togs and take a canter?"

John Smith stirred the logs in the fireplace and cast a hesitant glance toward Valerie.

"It's a little chilly out, isn't it?" he asked. "And father snug right here by the fire, eh?"

"I suppose you'd be happier here," she said, and closed the window again.

"You don't mind?" queried John Smith guiltily.

"Not the least bit. It was just a fancy."

"Glad of that," sighed John Smith, and, sliding somewhat lower in his chair, he stretched his legs to the blaze. But Valerie turned for the first time that evening to Van Siebert and sent him such a bright and steadfast look that it brought his heart to his throat and he glanced about him afterward, to see if any one had noted it. But no one dared attach significance to Valerie's glances and smiles; it might be a man's necktie which pleased her—or the cut of his hair.

One retired early at Wandermere, for the host set the pace, and by eleven the house was dark and noiseless. It was then that Valerie slipped out of the bed into which her maid had seen her retire and dressed hastily, humming while she worked. She turned on only the light at her dressing-table, for a greater illumination might attract attention. In that glass she studied herself with satisfaction; she had never looked so well, she thought. There was that color in her cheek and that touch of a smile at the corners of her mouth which only one thing could put there. Finally she put on a snug tailored hat and an overcoat with a great collar of red fox. Van Siebert had admired that coat, on a day. She was smiling at the memory while she glanced about the room for a mute farewell. All was as it lay printed indelibly in her mind; nothing ever changed at Wandermere—nothing except Valerie. She switched out the light, and so doing her eyes traveled through the window and far out across the moonlit forest. Freedom!

She began at once shudderingly eager to leave the place and hurried into the hall. There she heard—or rather felt—a faint vibration with something familiar in it. Then she remembered and chuckled softly. For John Smith was a famous sleeper and his snoring was proverbial. There was that story of Mrs. Philip Askworth and the earthquake at her country house—Valerie followed a sudden impulse, opened the door, and was in her husband's room. She was not sorry to look her last upon him while he slept.

The slant moonlight cut across the room and struck full upon his face, round, rosy

from the chill air, with the mouth stupidly open. And his snoring filled the room. Valerie made a little moue at the sleeper—surely without malice in it—and laid her hand upon the door to retreat.

It was then that she remembered the picture, and Valerie, being a woman, decided to see it for herself.

It was not hard to do. The closet door opened without squeak or groan and she found the clothes he had worn that day. John Smith would never let his man take anything from the pockets of his clothes; neither would he change his suit more than twice a week, for such attention he called "society nonsense." So Valerie found the pigskin case in his breast pocket and carried it over to the window.

When she opened it, she was looking at herself.

It was a miniature Sarrony painted shortly after Valerie came out. In fact, a published copy of that picture had brought John Smith east to their meeting. Unquestionably it was a masterpiece, and even by that dim light Valerie caught the color and the flowerlike charm that was hers and the peculiar golden tint of her skin. And this was the woman John Smith loved in secret.

"It's Pandora's Box with reverse English," whispered Valerie to herself. "First out fly a crowd of hopes and happiness and then a sting at the end."

If she were to wake the sleeper now and ask him what it meant, he would not be able to tell her, but he would stammer and grow confused. Yet she knew. She put the pigskin case back in its place, listened for another moment to the snoring of the sleeper, and then went thoughtfully back to her own room.

This time she lighted both the globes

beside her dressing-table and she sat down to stare. Not at herself. But she was trying to find in herself and behind her own face, the face of the girl who was still loved by John Smith. At first she could make no distinction, but by degrees that other, younger face grew out like a ghost, the face which Sarrony had painted with those long, dexterous fingers and those questing eyes which had eaten into her soul. What he saw he painted, and he had seen everything.

It is possible for us to separate ourselves into a mind which sees and a mind which feels and Valerie became the mind which sees everything, as Sarrony had seen it. She had to shut out the vision with a cold hand. But when she did this she began to see those mountains where John Smith had first met her, and the light which had come in his eyes when he looked at her. It had been only a reflection of herself that made that light. Now the light was no longer in the eyes of John Smith because fire had burned out in her. He was a lumpish figure in clay. But what was she?

She went down to the side entrance of the house and there, as she opened the door, Van Siebert stepped out from behind a pillar and the moonlight was brilliant around his curly head.

"Valerie!" he called softly.

"Hush!" whispered Valerie. "Put your car back. I can't go."

"You don't mean you're going to stay in this dungeon?"

"You've found you can't care for me?"

"Oh, my dear," she said, "I love you truly for the first time."

"Are you mad? Will you stay here with—"

"With a ghost," said Valerie.

## THE STREAM

BY GRACE MACGOWAN COOKE.

**A**-GIPSYING, a-gipsying, on silver feet I run,  
I pity all earth's prisoners held captive by her bars.  
By day my spray glows bright with all the colors of the sun;  
At night my pools spread black and still to hold God's glorious stars.

# Moors End

by Jeannette I. Helm

Author of "The House of the Purple Stairs," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

CARLOS BRENT received a letter from his great-uncle, Gregory Deane, who lived alone in a house called "Moors End," on the island of Seetucket, off the Massachusetts coast, asking him to spend two weeks there. The old man was about to make his will, and intended to leave his entire estate to either Carlos or his second cousin, Shirley Deane, who was to stay at Moors End later.

That afternoon Carlos left New York for Seetucket, on a Sound steamboat. Aboard he became acquainted with a pretty girl, and that night had a tussle with a hard-looking character, apparently an ex-prize-fighter, who had tried to break into her stateroom. On another boat, bound for Seetucket, he learned that the girl was Shirley Deane, his rival for their great-uncle's fortune. Carlos liked the girl, and perhaps would have withdrawn from the contest but for an invalid half-sister, who needed his help financially. He and Shirley agreed to be "good" enemies, but each was determined to get the fortune.

Gregory Deane lived alone—except for a man-servant—in a handsome house in a lonely part of the island. As he and Shirley approached the house Carlos thought that he saw the ex-pug hiding behind a tree, but could not be sure. The house was deserted; the front door unlocked. The man and the girl entered; found food; made themselves comfortable in comfortable rooms. Some time in the night Carlos heard some one descending the stairs; following, he saw a man attempting to force a safe in the lower hall. Carlos attacked the fellow and was knocked out.

Next morning an elderly man introduced himself as Uncle Gregory and said that he had been in the house all night, suffering from a headache. Carlos could find no trace of the intruder, although the bridge connecting Moors End and the main part of the island had been blown down by a storm in the night. Uncle Gregory was in turn suave and harsh, and seemed to favor Carlos, who suggested that he divide his estate between the second-cousins. When Shirley heard of this she was furious, and Carlos, also angry, cried: "I'll win this money—and you in the bargain."

That night Uncle Gregory was attacked by an intruder and saved by Carlos, who later searched the house and island, but could find no trace of the man. His great-uncle caught him looking through the keyhole of a room on the top floor, and was furious, saying that the room contained personal souvenirs.

Shirley and Carlos found a secret passage leading from the house to a boat-house on a small harbor. A dory was approaching the island and was capsized in the surf. Carlos rescued its occupant, and found that he was the ex-prize-fighter of the Sound boat.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### IN THE NIGHT.

THE cut proved to be a minor affair; but he must have struck his head hard, for he was still half unconscious and breathing heavily. There was a dipper in the boat which I filled with water and dashed over his face.

The man's eyelids quivered and then unclosed; he looked up into Shirley's face, and over his own came an evident recog-

nition. He spoke a few words hoarsely and we both bent over to listen.

"He's here."

His eyes closed again and he relapsed into total unconsciousness.

"He? Who does he mean?" I asked, puzzled.

Shirley did not answer but, from the look of fear that sprang into her eyes, I felt sure she knew or at least suspected, to whom he referred.

"We must get him up to the house at

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for July 10.

once," she said abruptly. "I'll help you carry him."

It was no easy matter for me to drag that inert and wholly unpleasant burden up over the slope to the house, and several times I was tempted to let him take his chances outside; but Shirley's anxious face helped me on. At last, we got him into the house and laid him on one of the horse-hair sofas, where he sprawled, an ungainly sight.

"He should have something done for him," said Shirley anxiously. "Will you take off his things and wrap him in blankets while I make a hot drink?"

"Oh, come," I protested. "You're not to wait on this old bum. I'll do what's necessary. By the way, isn't this the same man that was on the Sound boat?"

Shirley gave me a look, half of appeal and half of fear, and started up-stairs without replying. Just at that moment the tall bent figure of my uncle appeared in the doorway.

"What is this?" he asked quickly, striding toward us. "Who is that man?"

"I don't know. He was rowing toward the landing, but his boat capsized and I had to pull him ashore. He's hurt his head rather badly, I think."

My uncle made a quick step forward and peered down into the man's face. Instantly, the same look of recognition and fear that had been Shirley's flashed over it.

"He is here, then," he muttered to himself. "What shall I do?"

Almost the same words the man had used. Who was this "he" of which they both stood in dread, and which the man had so evidently come to warn us about? Before I could speculate any further, Uncle Gregory turned to me with a quick renewal of his old calm manner.

"I think this man has had concussion of the brain. He must be gotten to bed at once; take his feet and I'll take his head."

Together we carried him up-stairs and I wondered a little at my uncle's strength in managing so heavy a man. We got him into bed in one of the spare rooms but my uncle vetoed the suggestion of a hot drink.

"He has liquid enough now inside him.

The main thing is to keep him quiet until we can get the doctor to-morrow. I'll give him a small hypodermic, as I always keep some on hand for emergencies."

It seemed a good idea and I could not help admire the dexterity with which he prepared and shot home the little needle.

"There," said my uncle, shutting the door behind him. "He will be safe enough until to-morrow."

There was still a tense look about his face and I made up my mind to get to the root of the matter. Shirley had gone down-stairs to prepare supper, and we were alone.

"Uncle, who is this man? You seem to know him and I'll swear Shirley does, too." He shot me a quick glance.

"Did he say anything to her?" he snapped.

"Just a few words."

"What were they?"

"'He's here.'"

"Nothing more?"

"No."

He studied my face as if trying to decide how much he should tell me.

"I do know the man," he said quietly. He is a dangerous man, and the associate of one even more dangerous."

"You mean the man who tried to choke you?"

"The same."

"Who is he?" I asked eagerly.

"An enemy of mine."

"Does Shirley know him?" I was determined to get at the truth, now.

"She ought to," replied my uncle dryly.

"He is her father."

"Her father?" I gasped. "Then he is—"

"My nephew, Richard. Exactly. That is why I am so powerless, and may not call in the police, even if the bridge were not down and all communication cut off for a time."

"But surely your own nephew would not dare to attempt murder?"

Uncle Gregory smiled sadly.

"You don't know him; he will dare anything for his own ends. I hold certain proofs of his criminality which he is anxious to get; for so long as I have these in

my possession, I can protect both myself and the rest of the world from his further depredations. By living, as I do, on this desolate island, cut off from all communication—except by water and the bridge—with the mainland, and guarded by a faithful servant, I have managed to remain secure from him so far. You have seen the extra bolts and locks down-stairs, and realize now why I was so insistent about your identifying yourself when you came. I had to be certain that you were no agent or accomplice of his.

"I had been safe so long, however, that I suppose I had become more careless of danger. When Peter's sister was known to be seriously ill in Boston, I let him go, relying on your presence here to safeguard me. My nephew, however, must have known this and laid his plans with devilish ingenuity.

"He came here by that large motorboat you saw wrecked in the cove—probably, he was ignorant of the other safer landing—and left his boat too near the rocks. The storm prevented his escaping, and he has lurked about here, ready, as you see, to take any chance of effecting his ends.

"I feel sure he is going to make a supreme desperate effort to-night, and to that purpose, this man here may have joined him. Fortune has favored us so far in making the latter unconscious, and to-morrow I shall hand him over to the police. To-night, however, we shall have to fight our own battle, and it will not be an easy one. I say 'we'—can I count on you, Carlos?"

"Indeed you can," I answered heartily. There was an appeal in my uncle's voice, and a spirit in his firm tones, that roused an immediate answer in me.

Here was an old man; my only relative, for this other uncle—his nephew—did not count, since I could believe easily all I heard of his lack of family interest, facing alone a desperate struggle with a clever rascal—and he must be clever to have escaped us so far!

It was my duty to help, and I was young enough to enjoy the situation. Only one thing made me anxious. How much of this did Shirley know?

My great-uncle's keen eyes caught my momentary hesitation.

"What is it?" he asked quickly.

"Shirley—does she know that her father is here?"

He answered my question by another.

"Did Shirley show any special recognition of this man?"

"Yes," I answered reluctantly, for I saw where his question pointed. "I'm sure she knew who he was, but I don't think for a moment that she has anything to do with this."

I was not going to tell him that the man had been on the boat with us, but a little lurking doubt began to rise in me, in spite of my confident words. It all fitted in too well for my peace of mind.

"I wish I could feel the same," said my uncle sorrowfully. "I don't mean that I believe she came here with any purpose of aiding him, but after all, he is her father and he may have terrorized her into helping him—and without some inside help he could never have gotten in so easily, or existed without food so long."

"But, uncle," I exclaimed, "Shirley would never do that, I'm sure, and I know a way by which he could have entered at any time."

"Indeed," said my uncle quickly. "What is that?"

"You remember the door to the laundry and wood-shed? I found a passageway leading underground from a little closet in the shed to the wharf."

"You did!—and how did you happen to find it?"

I told him, not omitting to mention the fact of my having a duplicate key. If he chose to think, as Shirley had hinted, that my having it was suspicious, he might do so. I was heartily sick of all this mystery and suspicion with which we were surrounded, and depressed at the thought that Shirley might be involved in it. Uncle Gregory did not seem to notice this, however.

"This is most important," he exclaimed. "You say the door was locked. Was the wood-shed locked also?"

"The small closet in the wood-shed was padlocked," I admitted.

"Ah! Then if the man had the key of the door he must have had the key of the padlock also. He could escape that way, but not enter—unless some one let him in."

I groaned inwardly, for I knew he was right, and did not like to think who the person might be.

"He could leave the padlock open until he got away," I suggested weakly.

"But you found it locked? No, important as your discovery is, I don't think it is the only way by which my brother made his entrance. However, we will take every precaution, and I will myself see to-night that it is closed effectually.

"I was not even aware of the presence of this passage which must date back, I imagine, to old smuggling days. I do not think, however, it will be used to-night. Now, let us make our plans."

"I would suggest a thorough search of the house, leaving no corner where any one could hide."

"I have already done so," replied my uncle decidedly. "There is no one but ourselves in the house."

"Then, what do you want me to do?"

"Simply this: will you stay in that man's room to-night, and see that he does not leave it in case he should become conscious? Let no one come into his room—above all, Shirley. I will attend to the rest. In this way you can help me most—will you do it?"

"Very well," I said, but without enthusiasm. I knew what Shirley would think of me and, worse still, what would she say!

"Another thing," continued my uncle, "on no account say anything to let Shirley suspect that you know who the man outside is, or that she has any share in it. It would be the quickest way to warn my brother.

"Now, let us go and get our supper. We shall need all our strength to-night."

We were all very silent at the meal; there was a strained, anxious look on Shirley's face, and although I tried to appear natural, I'm afraid it was a sad failure. My uncle's manner was calm, although he spoke little, and made a good supper, for which I envied him.

After we had finished, I went up to look

at my charge. I found him in the same condition, breathing heavily, but looking as ugly an invalid as ever an unwilling nurse took care of. The time dragged on my hands, and I needed a cigarette badly, but that was tabooed.

I was restless, too, and did not feel at all like sleeping, so I cast about for some way of passing the time. There was no books in the room except an ancient almanac, and a Young Lady's Keepsake for 1854, neither of which promised very exciting reading. I decided I would go down to the library, and lay in a supply. I went down, but had some difficulty in finding just what I wanted.

The door of the library was ajar, and while I browsed there among the books, dipping into this one and tasting that, I heard my uncle's shuffling step go through the hall and up the stairs. Then quiet settled down over the old house, except for the occasional creakings that are to be heard in such places.

One of these, louder than usual, drew me from skimming over "The Three Musketeers" and brought me to attention. I listened, and I heard it repeated.

Yes, I was not mistaken, it was some one coming softly down stairs. I blew out my candle and crept to the door, through which I peered. Whoever was coming down the stairs, carried a light, for I could see a glimmer which increased each second; then the carrier of the light came for an instant in my range of vision, and I saw that it was Shirley.

Well, there was nothing strange in her coming down stairs; it was not late, and she might easily have come on the same errand that I was on. In fact, she came at once to the library door and I was annoyed, for I could not very well explain why I was lurking there in the dark.

On a foolish impulse, I slipped swiftly behind a tall screen, and regretted it as instantly, for if she found me here like this she would certainly accuse me of spying—and with some good reason. The longer I delayed showing myself the more difficult my action would be to explain. I could only hope that she might leave soon and would not discover me.

To my intense embarrassment, she came at once toward me, but only to pass by on her way to the corner of the room, where the safe stood. I pricked up my ears and leaned forward. Was I going to discover something after all? She stood for some seconds in front of the safe, and the candle-light, falling on her face, showed it to be drawn and anxious.

Then, as if she had made up her mind at last, she snatched something out of her loose kimono and laid it on the top of the safe, turned, and made her way swiftly out of the room. I waited until I heard her go up-stairs, and then relit my own candle. I hated to spy on her, but I must see what the thing was she had left on the safe.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A KISS.

I STOOD for several minutes staring down at the little object on top of the safe, a worn, brown leather purse with a folded slip of paper tucked under it. Involuntarily, I picked up the purse and opened it.

There was nothing inside but a gold ring with a fair-sized diamond which I had noticed on Shirley's hand. What on earth did all this mean? One thing was certain: I had to see what was inside the paper.

I felt like a brute as I laid the shabby little purse down and unfolded the paper, but it had to be done. There were two lines hurriedly scratched on the inside of the half sheet of paper and I read them twice carefully.

C. M. in house. Safer to go at once.

S.

I thought many things as I read it. Undoubtedly it was a message for her father, a warning, left here on the safe, but what did the purse and ring mean? I could readily understand that with his accomplice securely locked up, whatever plans they had made might miscarry, but why was Shirley warning him unless she, too, was in the plan?

With a sickening sensation I realized that I had stumbled upon something that

I would much rather have avoided. If I had followed my own inclinations I would have left both paper and purse, but my duty to my uncle demanded that I show my discovery to him.

With a heavy heart I picked them up and put them in my pocket, then took my candle and went up-stairs. As I pushed open the door of my charge's room I was surprised to see a light in it and some one bending over the bed. It was Shirley, and as she turned and saw me, she colored guiltily, as I thought.

"I came in to see if our patient needed anything," she said with overdone carelessness. "I thought I heard him groan, but he seems to be sleeping quietly."

"I think he is as comfortable as can be," I answered. "Uncle Gregory has put him in my care to-night, so you need not worry about him."

If she saw the hint that I was rather clumsily trying to convey, she did not move. Instead, she looked at me with a return of her former suspicious manner, but did not speak. I grew decidedly uncomfortable. How was I to get her out as my uncle had requested?

"You must be quite tired," I suggested. "This has been rather an exciting day."

"I rested this afternoon, thank you. I thought that as all things go in threes, and we have had two disturbed nights already, I would be prepared for a third."

I fancied there was a mocking knowledge in her words as if she, too, knew more than she chose to tell, so I determined to use a little diplomacy.

"What makes you think we shall be disturbed?" I asked in my most innocent manner.

"Simply the law of sequence," she replied as innocently. "Don't you think so, too?"

"Anything is likely to happen here, but, 'forewarned is forearmed,' you know. If any one should come to-night, he is likely to meet with a warm reception."

I thought she winced, but her voice was quite calm as she replied:

"Then I shall feel quite safe under your protection, if you have all the keys of the house, as well as that of the laundry?"

I felt myself growing red. Why on earth couldn't she leave that old key business alone? It was a neat thrust, however, but I countered as neatly.

"You seem to attach a great deal of importance to the fact that I happened to have a duplicate key. Perhaps you would like to keep it, yourself?"

I handed her the key, but she waved it aside.

"Thank you, no. It is quite possible to have more than one duplicate. I have no use for it to-night."

I felt my temper rising, but I held it back.

"Just what do you mean by that?" I asked steadily.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Anything you choose to take."

"Then, I take it that you consider my actions suspicious, and yet they are not half so suspicious as yours."

She whirled on me.

"What do you mean?"

I pointed to the man on the bed.

"That man was the one who was in your stateroom on the Sound boat; he followed us to the island; and when we walked out here I saw him, hiding behind a dune, watching us. You know who he is, and he recognized you."

She faced me steadily, although her face flamed.

"Who has told you all this? Uncle Gregory?"

"I saw it for myself. You know what this man has come here for. What is it?"

She met my question proudly.

"I shall not tell you. You may give Uncle Gregory any impression you like."

"If Uncle Gregory has not already formed his own impressions he is less clever than I think him," I returned dryly. "Certainly I have had nothing to do with them."

She laughed mockingly.

"You don't expect me to believe that you would lose such a good opportunity to gain favor with my uncle?"

I lost my temper entirely at this. My uncle had asked me not to warn her in any way, that we suspected her; I had already said too much in referring to her knowing

that man, so here was I, obliged to submit to her taunts, while my best retort, the fact of the purse and note must remain unused.

"I don't know what you expect to get by insulting me," I muttered.

She laughed in my face.

"Perhaps it is because when you are angry you show your true colors."

"We won't discuss the subject," I said, my voice low with anger, "but I suggest that you amuse yourself with some one else in some other place."

I walked to the door and held it open. She did not move, but stood watching me defiantly.

"So you hinted before, but more delicately. Well, I'm sorry to tell you that I have quite as much right in this room as you have, and that I intend to stay here."

She looked so defiant, and so pretty, standing there, glaring at me like an angry kitten, that my wrath subsided to annoyance.

"See here, Shirley, don't be foolish about this thing. Uncle Gregory has asked me to stay with this man, alone, and I intend to do it. You will save us both a very unpleasant scene if you go now quietly."

"What will you do if I don't go?" she remarked. "Has chivalry anything to suggest? Because—I don't intend to go until I am ready."

If only I could have felt really angry, it would have been easier, but for the life of me, I could not lay hands on her, and the little wretch knew it. I walked over to the bed and stood with my back to her, trying to think of some way to get her out peaceably, but, womanlike, she pressed her advantage too far.

"You make rather a poor conspirator, Carlos," she sneered. "While you were thinking up compliments, your charge would escape."

I turned and faced her.

"You have no difficulty in thinking up disagreeable speeches, at any rate. Now, will you kindly leave the room?"

Before she could utter the defiance I saw on her lips, I had calmly stooped down, picked her up and carried her out of the room. I had intended merely to

set her down in the hall outside, but I could not do it at once for the fact that her hands were clutched in my hair.

There was nothing in the least loving about the grasp; nothing but an intense determination to remove my hair together with most of my scalp; and for a moment the fury of the attack was such that I was practically helpless, while she clawed and tore to her heart's content. Then, I managed to secure first one small, vengeful hand and then the other, and held them tight in one of mine.

"You little vixen!" I said. "I'll stop you."

I bent my head and kissed the small, angry face glaring up at me.

The effect was more startling than I had expected; for a moment, she still glared up at me with a look of intense hate, then all expression vanished from her face, leaving it stony.

"You'll be sorry for this," she said in a quiet voice.

I was sorry already. I put her down gently, and for a moment we stood there, in the dimly lit hall, looking at each other in silence.

"I beg your pardon," I said at last, gruffly, for I was angry at myself and I hadn't forgiven her by any means. My scalp still tingled from the attack upon it, but it was nothing compared to the smart of knowing I had taken advantage of her.

"It wasn't your fault," answered Shirley in a colorless voice. "Since I didn't behave like a lady, you had every excuse for not acting like a gentleman."

This hardly put me at my ease. I would have felt more comfortable if she had scolded, sworn, or clawed me again, and I didn't quite like this calm acceptance of the affair. It wasn't like what I knew of Shirley; red-headed people don't usually stop when they are once started. If she had wanted to embarrass me, she succeeded admirably.

"Please don't say that, Shirley," I blurted out. "You had every right to fight back and it wasn't because I didn't respect you that I kissed you."

Shirley smiled. It was a mere flash, and her face instantly resumed its cold

look—but it was more encouraging, at least.

"Really? Why then?"

"Because I wanted to—I couldn't help it."

I stopped, expecting another outburst of anger, but, instead, she only looked at me in a dazed way, like a child that has been struck. Then, as though she were a child, indeed, her lip began to tremble, and the tears welled up into her eyes.

I hate to see any woman cry, but to have Shirley, my brave little comrade and antagonist, give way like this, was indescribably touching. I made a quick step forward, and took her forlorn little figure in my arms.

"Shirley, little girl! Please forgive me!" I begged.

Women are the strangest of created things. She hadn't resented my kissing her half so much as I expected; now when I was, metaphorically, acting the doormat, she turned on me fiercely and wrenched herself away.

"Don't touch me!" she cried in a half-choked voice, and ran into her room, leaving me to stare after her and swear that I never would apologize to any girl again, no matter what I had done!

## CHAPTER XIX.

### THE THIRD NIGHT.

I WALKED moodily back into the room and sat down. The man still lay on his back, breathing stertorously, and there was nothing more that could be done for him. I tried to keep my mind fixed on the coming night, but my thoughts obstinately insisted on going over and over again my interview with Shirley.

In spite of my recent discovery, I couldn't believe that she had anything to do with her father's being here; although, the affair of the warning note showed that, at least she had communication with him—even more, knowledge of an impending attack on the safe, else why would she have left the note there? There was, as certainly, some understanding between her and the man now lying on the bed before me,

and my uncle had just said that he was a creature of her father's.

It must be true, as Uncle Gregory had said, that he had terrorized her in some way into—if not giving active service—at least keeping his secret of ingress and exit. Very likely, she had known more about the tunnel to the landing than I, and I remembered now that she had been the one to insist that it must lead to an opening.

It seemed to me that it would have been more sensible to watch Shirley this night, rather than look after an unconscious man; but I had had enough of her for one time, and if my uncle wanted the job, he could have it.

She was a little vixen, and the man that married her would have his hands full. How she had glared at me as if she would like to kill me, and—how her face had softened when I had blurted out the truth about the kiss! Confound it all! I was a silly fool, and she knew it; she might only have been playing on my weakness all the time, and be, even now, laughing at her success with me.

The thought stiffened me, and I sat up. She had taunted me with being a poor conspirator, and it was up to me to show her what I could do.

The door opened gently, and Uncle Gregory came in, carrying a lighted candle. He set it down and crossed over to the bed, where he stood for some time.

His own face looked pinched and haggard, but there was the same feverish strength of purpose in his figure that I had noticed before. He felt the man's pulse, and nodded as if satisfied.

"He'll do until morning. He hasn't been conscious at any time?"

"No."

"Has any one been here but yourself?"

"I found Shirley here when I came in," I admitted reluctantly.

"She was here with him—alone? Idiot! didn't I tell you to keep her out?"

He fairly shrieked out the words, and his lean figure quivered with anger.

"She was here first; I came up directly afterwards," I retorted sullenly. "She could only have been with him a moment, and he was asleep all the time."

He cooled down at once.

"My dear boy, my nerves are unstrung to-night. Did she say anything to you?"

"She said she wouldn't go out."

"Oh! and then—"

"I put her out."

"Oh!" Uncle Gregory's eyes strayed, as if by chance, to my hair, which I realized must be sticking up wildly around my head, and he laughed softly to himself.

"Evidently she had good reasons for not wanting to go; I think you had better keep an eye on her, too."

"I decline the job, absolutely; the casualties were too heavy in the first encounter."

"So it seems. Well, I think we can arrange this without any encounter."

He held up a key, and nodded toward the hall significantly.

"I see, you mean to lock her in?"

"After she is asleep, yes. Now, I think I will go to my room and try to get a little rest. You had better do the same on that lounge, yonder, but remember, on no account to desert your charge."

"I have gone all over the lower part of the house, and everything is absolutely secure. I hardly think we shall be troubled to-night."

I had put it off as long as I could, but I felt that it was my duty to tell Uncle Gregory of the note left by Shirley. It was bad enough to have spied on her without turning informer, too; and I had determined not to mention it to my uncle, but his last words left me no choice. If he thought that we should be undisturbed, Shirley did not; else she would not have left the urgent message on the safe this very night. It had to be told, and I blurted it out somehow.

"I think we shall decidedly be troubled, if this means anything."

I handed him the note and purse, feeling like a cad as I did so. He read the lines and his lips tightened.

"Where did you find this? Who left it?" he asked sharply.

"On the safe in the library. Shirley put it there an hour ago."

"And how did you happen to see her do it?"

I was angry at myself and the situation.

"I wasn't spying on her, if that's what you mean," I answered surlily. "I was in the library choosing a book when I heard some one creeping down-stairs, and put out my candle, thinking it might be some one I should watch. To my surprise, it was Shirley, and she came directly to the library."

"I knew she would be suspicious at finding me in the dark there, so I—well, I stepped behind the screen; then she went over to the safe and left the purse and note there. I found them after she had gone, and brought them here to show you."

Somehow, it sounded even more caddish told in this bald way, but my uncle did not seem to notice it. He stood for a moment looking down at the little worn purse in his hand, and an odd smile flickered over his lips. For an instant his keen eyes seemed to soften.

"After all, he is her father," he murmured. "We can't blame her for a little loyalty." His tone changed to a cold, businesslike one. "You did right to show these to me, Carlos, but I fancy that they will do more good replaced where they were, so that he may see them. No, I will go down myself. I feel safer to have you up here with this dangerous man. I think, after all, we shall have a good night's rest—if this warning is taken."

"I hope so—I shouldn't mind a full night's sleep."

Uncle Gregory looked at me keenly for a moment, then slipped out without a word. He was back in a few moments more, with a flask half full of whisky, the same from which he had given me the drink before.

"Take some of this and it will steady you. I never indulge, myself, but it is good for emergencies such as this."

I shook my head, I did not fancy his thinking that my courage needed stimulating in this way.

"Thanks, not now. I may take some later."

"Very well. Good night."

He placed the flask on the table and withdrew noiselessly. I made my few preparations for retiring; which consisted of dragging the lounge across the door so that no one could come in without waking

me, gathering a pillow and some coverlets from my room, and shading the light. Then I rolled myself up in the blankets and laid down on the lounge. It was very still in the house; the wind had completely died down, and after the turmoil of the last two days the silence seemed almost tangible. Down-stairs I could hear the faint ticking of the big clock, and every now and then the woodwork creaked loudly.

I knew these were only the noises to be heard in any old house, but if one is waiting for an unknown danger to strike in an unforeseen place, one is apt to be fanciful.

Twice I sat up as I thought I heard steps passing softly through the hall, and laid down again determined not to let my nerves run away with me. These must have been somewhat tense, for, whenever the embers of my fire fell with a sudden rustle in the grate, I started up.

The clock struck eleven, and I realized that if I kept this up I should have no rest at all. I didn't feel sleepy, my head was singularly clear and active, but I felt that it would be wiser to get what rest I could, in case the night followed its predecessors in excitement. I laid down again, and resolutely shut my eyes, and by dint of many time-worn, sleep-producing devices fell at last into an uneasy doze.

I had no means of knowing how long I slept, for I had forgotten to wind my watch, but I woke suddenly. Neither do I know what woke me; there was no noise, and the same oppressive silence filled the darkness around me, but I was conscious that something had waked me and dragged me back reluctantly from a heavy sleep.

I sat up and listened, but there was nothing except the distant sullen thud of the surf outside. Then I realized, all at once, what had disturbed me—the same thing which had waked me on the Fall River boat; not a noise, but the cessation of a noise.

I had gone to sleep listening to the man's heavy breathing, now there was perfect quiet in the room! The lamp was out by his bed, but I had left the candle and matches on the floor beside me. I felt for these, lit a candle, and with it in my hand approached the bed.

The man lay on his back, as before, but this time his eyes, instead of being heavily shut, were open and staring about him with a growing consciousness. He looked at me, furtively, as I lit the lamp beside the bed and blew out the candle. With his frowsy head and misshapen ear, he looked uglier than ever, and it took all my charity to speak to him civilly.

"Feeling better? Is there anything I can do for you?"

He tried to speak, but as his voice was only a husky growl, I had to bend my ear close to hear what he said.

"Where is he?"

"Who do you mean?"

"The Big Swell! Have you got 'im?" I shook my head.

"No, but we soon will."

He studied my face a moment with his small crafty eyes.

"Who are you?"

"Carlos Brent, Mr. Dean's great-nephew. See here, you've had a nasty clip on the head. Don't you think you had better take it easy?"

"I'm all right," he growled, "It knocked me out, but I'll get there."

He made an effort to rise but fell back, swearing freely.

"Me bloomin' nut goes round," he croaked, "but I ain't counted out yet. Lend me a fin, mate, so I kin git up."

He certainly had courage and extraordinary strength, for he had had a knock serious enough to have put any man out of commission, but I imagine that the morphine had the effect, as it sometimes does, of stimulating rather than soothing.

I gave him my arm, and he dragged himself up to the accompaniment of much profanity and stood, swaying dizzily, for a moment. Then he sank back on the edge of the bed again.

"My legs is made of macaroni, curse 'em. Where's the girl?"

"Do you mean Shirley?"

"Yes. She knows what he's up to."

My heart sank at this evidence against Shirley. I couldn't bear to think that she was in league with this dirty pugilist. As I thought of her frank, brave face I could not believe it; yet here was absolute testi-

mony. But the last thing that I wanted was to have the two come together. I knew I could control the man, in his present condition, but I didn't want to excite him.

"Take it easy," I said soothingly. "There will be time enough for you to see her."

Whether he suspected my purpose or not, a dull anger began to gleam in his eyes.

"See here!" he croaked belligerently. "You—"

He stopped abruptly, and his eyes swung past mine to the door while his whole body stiffened into listening. I had heard it, too, the dull thud that had broken in upon us; a sound that was neither loud nor unusual, but very different from the muffled drop of the breakers on the rocks. We both listened a moment longer.

"D' ye hear that?" croaked the man triumphantly, "it's him! Petering the safe, he is!"

## CHAPTER XX.

### A MEETING IN THE DARK.

MY police-court newspaper experience stood me in good stead now, so I knew what he meant, and what a dull thud signified. Some one was down there blowing open the safe, after having tied it up in heavy coverlets to muffle the noise.

Where was my uncle, and what was he doing? I must get to him at once and help him. He had told me to watch this man, but he could do no special harm now, and I might be needed at once.

I ran to the door, dragged aside the sofa and tugged at the handle; it turned, but the door did not open. I wrenched furiously at it, but it did not move. The door had been locked from the outside, while I slept!

I wasted several perfectly good minutes in an attack of rage on the door before I realized I couldn't get out that way. It was far stouter than the one I had kicked in before, and there was nothing in the room heavy enough to act as a battering-ram. I heard a dry chuckle, and looked around to see my patient sitting on the

edge of the bed, shaking with an unholy mirth.

"He's too clever for you, he is," he cackled in the peculiar dry, thick voice of morphin. "Locked ye in and then petered the safe. But he's forgot me. I'll show him!"

His voice had changed to a furious snarl that promised ill for the "Big Swell." I imagined that some rivalry existed there, and that the man's presence might not be altogether premeditated or even desired. I had little time to think of these things, however—I wanted to get out of the room and get out quickly.

"How far is it to the ground?" croaked the man as if he read my thoughts. I ran to the window and looked down. There was a sheer drop of at least thirty feet below, and no way out there.

I was furious with my impotence; anything might be happening down-stairs, and here I was caged in this room. Suppose Shirley had slipped out while I slept and locked the door? The thought tortured me; I must get out somehow!

Just below the window was a little ledge of ornamental stonework. I might manage to get enough foothold there and creep over to the window of the next room. What could I cling to—and what if the window were closed? I am a bad climber; great heights make me dizzy, and the thought of edging like a fly along this precarious foothold would have held me back absolutely, at another time. Now, however, I was so filled with the one thought of getting out of the room, that I lost all sense of fear.

I got into my socks, trousers and sweater; I did not put on my shoes, for I needed my feet as second hands in this job. There was an old bell-pull made of heavy cord hanging in the corner, kept more for sentiment than use, as the rusty wire to which it was attached showed. I needed something to hold to in case my feet slipped, and this was all I could see. It was old, it might be rotten.

I dragged it down, and finding it fairly strong, I knotted one end to the leg of the bed, which was close to the window, and with the other end in my hand slipped cautiously out on the window-sill.

It must have been somewhere around five o'clock, for there was a faint gray light beginning to tinge the darkness, and the stars looked faded and unreal like revelers caught by early morning. As I looked down, a wave of nausea came over me, and for a moment I was tempted to go back.

But something urged me on; I was not going to let Shirley see that I could be shut in so easily, like a troublesome boy. I gritted my teeth, and felt with my toes for the ledge below.

The man inside had staggered again to his feet and was watching me curiously, but I paid little attention to him. With my rope twisted around one wrist, I held on to the sill and felt for the shutters. As it was by their support that I intended to pass from one window to another, my success, possibly my life, depended upon whether they were strong enough to bear my weight; and—equally important—whether they were securely latched back. The man had swayed close to the rope, and I thought I read in his eyes an evil intention.

"Don't touch that rope," I yelled. "If you do I'll come back and carve up your other ear."

"You've got nerve," he growled. "Take my hand and steady yourself along."

He leaned far out the window, and I saw the sense of his offer. Steadied by his grip, I could go more quickly and farther, but would he play fair? I had to risk something, so I took his horny hand, but not without misgivings, and bearing most of my weight on the shutters.

His grip was strong, however, and by its aid I reached safely the half of the distance. Here a greater difficulty confronted me; with both shutters open there would be a space between them of a foot or more, and this I had expected to pass by swinging myself from one shutter to another.

Now, as I reached it, I saw to my dismay that the shutter of the other window had swung to, leaving a space of at least three feet. There was only one way to reach it now; I must advance as far as I could, holding on to my shutter, and then make a spring for the remaining distance, trusting to get a hold on the other shutter.

There was every doubt as to whether I would succeed, but I was in for it now and it was better to go on than crawl back defeated. A queer little thought flew across my brain of how Shirley had looked when I kissed her, then I shut my teeth and made my spring. My fingers missed the edge of the shutter and struck the blinds instead, down which they went rattling and scraping, finding no hold.

With a sickening feeling I knew I had failed and was falling—then my fingers clutched desperately in the bottom of the shutter. Blessings on the old New Englander who did his work so well! Under my weight, thus suddenly thrown upon it, the shutter groaned on its hinges and half opened, leaving me swinging in the air and holding on desperately by both hands.

Then it swung back, and I caught the window-sill with my left hand, managed to grip with my right also, and bracing my knees against the wall drew myself up. Luckily the window was open, or I might have lost my balance again. As it was, I fairly fell into the room and lay on the floor gasping for breath.

I didn't waste any more time than was necessary to recover myself; things might be happening below, and I wanted to find out just what they were. I was getting softly to my feet, when a sound froze me motionless; the cautious opening of a door into the room and the careful tread of slippered feet.

The sound did not come from the direction of the door leading to the hall, but seemed to come from the farther side of the room, which was a corner one. As far as I could remember, there was no other entrance to the room except by the door to the hall, and this puzzled me. Whoever it was, knew the house well, and, moreover, was not anxious to be heard; judging from the stealthy walk.

I made up my mind right there that it was my immediate business to surprise that person, and find out who it was. Fortunately, I had made no noise beyond my first entry, and I didn't think the intruder realized my presence. I drew closer into the corner, where I had first fallen, and waited until, in the dim gray light, I could

just make out a figure creeping across the room.

I gathered myself together and sprang on it; there was a shriek, a wild beating of hands and for the second time that night I held Shirley in my arms.

"Shirley!" I exclaimed. "What are you doing here?"

She was standing quietly in my grasp, although her body trembled slightly.

"What are you doing?"

"Some one locked the door of my room, I had to get out this way."

"But there is no door between the rooms?" Her voice was both puzzled and troubled.

"No, I had to get around by the window."

"You mean you climbed from one window to another?"

"Exactly."

"But, that was terribly dangerous."

The trouble in her voice was now uppermost, and I felt my purpose wavering. She cared then, that I had been in danger! All my old feelings for her rushed back to defend her against the suspicions I had been encouraging.

"You would have cared, then, if I had fallen?" I asked impulsively.

"I—"

She checked herself, and when she spoke, I was fool enough to imagine that her words were different from what they would have been.

"It would have been very inconvenient."

"No undertaker being handy," I replied bitterly.

I fancied that in the growing light I could see her smile.

"You are very intuitive."

"Constant hammering will make any man wise," I retorted, "but you haven't told me how you came to be here—this isn't your room."

"No, but there is a little passageway over the stairs leading from my room to this. The doors weren't locked, which was fortunate, for I wanted to get out as badly as you did, and I'm afraid I should not have your courage in leaping from one window to the other."

"Why did you want to get out?" I asked.

She hesitated, then replied evasively: "Why did you?"

"Oh, I wanted to stroll in the moonlight. Was that your reason, too?" My sarcasm was clumsily obvious—as I. had intended it to be.

She gave an angry start and her voice was full of vibrating passion.

"I don't expect you to believe anything but what is bad of me. You and my uncle have suspected me ever since that man came; and you, at least, have taken no pains to hide your suspicions.

"But what of your actions, have they been above suspicion? How do I know that in your desire to get the money you haven't prejudiced Uncle Gregory against me? Who was it locked my door?"

She fairly hurled these accusations at me and I was silent under the shock of hearing them from her. So these were the pleasant things she had been thinking about me all the time? I forgot that I had been thinking equally unpleasant things about her, if with more reason.

"How you do hate me," I said involuntarily. "But you cared if I fell."

"I don't care what happens to you," she returned savagely. "Please take your hands away."

I became conscious then, for the first time, that I was still holding her wrists, and dropped my hands quickly.

"We are foolish to stand here quarreling," I said coldly. "There is work for me to do down-stairs."

She caught at my sleeve as I moved toward the door.

"Did you hear that noise, too?"

"Yes, that is why I had to get out. Some one has blown open the safe."

She gave a gasp—but not of surprise.

"What are you going to do?" she faltered.

"Go down and investigate. He's probably had time to make his haul and get away. I was a fool to waste time here," I added bitterly.

Shirley's lips tightened, but she said nothing and followed me. I turned back at the head of the stairs.

"Go back to your room. This is no woman's work."

"I'm coming," she said mockingly, "or perhaps you intend to lock me in my room again."

Our eyes met and battled angrily. There was no time to be lost over an obstinate woman, for I imagined I heard the sound of steps below.

"Come, and be hanged," I said furiously, and turning went down-stairs.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### IN THE DAWN.

I HAD no definite plan of action, and I was entirely weaponless besides, so I stopped a moment to consider. My best plan would be to surprise the man if he was still there, and so gain an advantage; I had had one taste of his strength, and I knew that I must exert my own to the utmost to cope with it.

There were two doors to the library where the safe stood; one from the main hall and the other opening on to the side hall, just at the head of the stairs to the kitchen. I decided to take this one, as the man, if surprised by my entrance from the middle hall, might make his escape more readily through it.

As I stole down cautiously, my stocking feet making no sound, I glanced back over my shoulder and saw that Shirley had disappeared. I was glad she had decided to be sensible, and not follow me on such a dangerous quest. There was no telling what might happen, and I didn't want any woman mixed up in it—least of all Shirley.

Fortunately, the stairs did not creak any more than they usually do when you want to be quiet, and I reached the hall and stole noiselessly around through the little passageway. It was ten to one that the man had already escaped with whatever he was looking for, as it was already twenty minutes or more since I had first heard the safe blown open.

I was sure of this, although it seemed to me that an hour at least must have elapsed, for I remembered hearing the big clock in the stable, outside, strike five as I

climbed out of my window, and glancing at the clock in the hall as I passed I saw that it was twenty minutes after five. I was not going to take any chances, however, as he might imagine himself secure from interruption and so take his time.

The half darkness had changed to the cold, dismal light that precedes the sun's coming, and objects stood out with unnatural distinctness, unrelieved by any softening of light or shade. This crude daylight seemed, like a judge, to coldly weigh the defects of all it fell upon and present them in their stark ugliness. Everything looked shabby and dirty in this most disillusioning hour of the day, and I felt its cold spell falling on my courage as I tiptoed toward the door.

To my delight, it was open a crack; I had been afraid lest in turning the knob I might warn any one within. Cautiously I applied my eye to the crack, but could see nothing until I had eased it open an inch more. The safe came then into my range of vision; as I had expected, the door was hanging open; and, as I hoped, a man was in front of it busily ransacking the pigeon-holes.

Here was luck indeed; if I were careful I might still surprise him. As I opened the door softly and gathered myself for the spring, I heard a board creak behind me. I whirled around and saw Shirley standing with a pistol in her hand.

"What are you going to do?" she whispered anxiously.

The sensible thing to do would have been to snatch the pistol from her hand and use it for my own purpose; but my foolish pride thrust aside the wise suggestion.

"Keep quiet," I whispered back furiously, "and stand away from the door."

Shirley had half raised her hand with the pistol in it, now she let it drop to her side, her face aflame.

"I'm not going to shoot you in the back, if that is what you mean. I got it for you. Be quick, he will hear us."

We had barely breathed our words, but the man at the safe was already raising his head to a listening position. Before he could turn I had flung open the door, crossed the room and was on him.

He was as quick as I, however, and by a sudden turn he met my onslaught with a flexed elbow that drove deep into my stomach. The shock left me gasping for an instant, and that sufficed for him to catch my right leg and pull it up sharply.

I staggered back, and but for the safe would have fallen; as it was, one sharp edge caught me in the back, nearly knocking the remaining breath out of me. Instinctively, my hands shot out and fastened around his throat. At the moment an imperative voice rang out behind us.

"Stop, or I'll shoot."

She might have shot, for all I cared; I was too excited to stop now for any one, but a strange change came over my antagonist. His whole body relaxed, and as I couldn't go on choking a man that was not fighting back, I also loosened my grasp.

The safe stood in a corner of the library, that was dark even at midday, and I had had little chance during the struggle to see my enemy's face now, as I released him and he stepped back, I saw something that made me start forward in astonishment.

"Uncle Gregory!" I exclaimed. "Is it you?"

My uncle rubbed his throat with a dry smile.

"Why didn't you take the trouble to look before you leaped? You nearly choked me."

I could have replied with equal truth that he had nearly knocked me out, for my body was still sore from his violent and savage attack upon me; but I was still too much surprised at finding a friend instead of an enemy.

"I hope I haven't hurt you, sir," I said contritely. "I only saw your back and thought you were the burglar. Where is he?"

My uncle looked at me with the same wry smile.

"Gone by now; he blew open the safe half an hour ago. I heard the noise and hurried down, but he had already made his escape after ransacking the safe, as you see here."

"I heard the noise and tried to get down, too, but some one had locked my door and it took me some time to get out."

Uncle Gregory glanced at me curiously.

"It must have been he who locked your door. How on earth did you ever get out?"

"I crawled across from one window to another, and came out through the room next to mine. Then I came down-stairs, and seeing some one standing by the safe, naturally thought you were the burglar, and pitched into you."

"If Shirley hadn't interfered, either you or I would have been a dead man," observed Uncle Gregory grimly. "When you sprang on me from behind I naturally thought you were the man returned, and so put out all my strength against you."

"Which isn't inconsiderable—you nearly had me down. Did the man get what he came for?"

"I'm afraid so. I have been looking through everything to see if the paper I told you about was there, and I can't find it. He has destroyed or taken it, curse him!"

His voice vibrated with bitter anger, and his face was convulsed with one of his sudden rages. He took up a handful of papers and tore them across viciously, as if seeking to vent his anger in this way. Shirley, who had been watching him quietly, now spoke for the first time.

"Are you sure that the man has gotten away?"

My uncle turned on her with an evil gleam in his eyes, as if glad of an excuse for an outburst.

"He *has* got out safely," he snarled, "which will be good news to *you*, no doubt."

The ready color sprang to Shirley's face, and I guessed that Uncle Gregory would meet his match.

"What do you mean?" she asked quietly.

My uncle's anger vanished instantly, and was replaced by an airy contemptuousness that was even more irritating.

"I imagine that you might have some special interest in this man, seeing that he is such a close relative of yours."

Shirley's face went white but her voice was steady as she spoke.

"A relative of mine? Do you mean—"

He nodded.

"Precisely. Our night visitor is no other than your father. I don't think I have surprised you."

I hated to look at Shirley, but something drew my eyes to hers as she stood motionless, the pistol hanging limply by her side. Through the varying shades of anger, confusion and dismay that succeeded each other in her face, I saw nothing that gave a sense of reassurance. She was *not* surprised.

"My father?" she repeated, as if to gain time. "Why would he come here?"

"I regret we must assume it was for no good purpose, since he has just blown open my safe. His knowledge of the house has certainly been remarkable."

I was beginning to hate my great-uncle for his sly innuendoes. They struck home to Shirley at last.

"Do you mean to insinuate that I am in league with my father?" she asked in a curiously quiet voice.

Uncle Gregory shrugged his shoulders.

"Filial devotion has been known to go far," he observed. "There are times when one puts aside one's principles for another; especially when that other is one's father."

"One's father?" repeated Shirley, in a voice that vibrated with intense feeling. "You probably won't believe me, but I tell you that, if my father were drowning before my eyes, I wouldn't raise a hand to save him. I tell you I hate him and have good reason to wish him dead."

Uncle Gregory fixed her with a curious stare as if he would read the very inmost center of her mind. She returned it steadily, and at last he turned away quickly, as though satisfied. His shoulders drooped as if he were suddenly tired and his voice was flat and toneless as he answered:

"I do believe you. I apologize for my remarks. Now, will you both leave me here for a while, I wish to make a more thorough search for the paper."

Shirley turned toward the door without a word, but I lingered a moment.

"Are you sure you don't want me to make a further search for this man? He may still be hanging around here somewhere, and it is safer to make certain."

He shook his head.

"He has what he came for, I fear, and he is far away by now. Please leave me. I am very much upset."

I went out after Shirley, who was going up the steps slowly, as if also tired.

"Shirley, tell me what all this means," I begged, but she only shook her head and went on up-stairs.

I was just starting to follow her, when I heard a noise that brought me quickly to the bottom of the stairs again. Some one was thumping loudly on the front door. I ran out in the hall and saw a man outside looking through one of the side lights of the door.

Silhouetted against the early sunlight, with swollen features and staring eyes, I thought him at first a sea monster risen out of the deep, then I recognized him as my pugilist. How on earth he had gotten there I couldn't imagine, unless he had used the bell-rope to let himself down from the window, and as that was a scant ten feet long he must have dropped the remaining twenty.

Without thinking what I did, I ran to the door and unlocked it. At that moment Uncle Gregory appeared in the door of the library and uttered a shout of fear and anger as he took in my action.

"Don't let that man in," he screamed in a cracked voice.

I tried to slide the bolt to, but it was too late. The man's foot was between the door and the sill and his strong shoulder thrust in and heaved it open, throwing me back against the wall. With an inarticulate growl like a wild beast, he sprang on my great-uncle, who gave a kind of squeal and slipped nimbly past into the library, the door of which he tried to shut in the man's face.

But the fellow's strength was almost incredible; he shoved open that door as easily as though he had been opening an envelope, and tossed me out of his way when I tried to hold him back. Uncle Gregory darted across to the other door and around into the passageway to the main hall, where he made for the back door.

It was a clever trick, for the man, not knowing the house so well, blundered into

the dining-room and so lost time. He came into the hall just as the back door slammed, and my uncle's flying figure came down the garden. I expected every moment to see the fellow topple over, but he seemed to have an enormous maniacal energy. With another deep growl, he opened the door and rushed after my uncle.

Shirley had remained on the stairs, frozen with surprise.

"Stop him, he means to kill him," she cried, and thrust the pistol into my hand. The weapon gave me at least a chance in the game, and with it, I raced down the hall, followed by Shirley.

We were in time to see the man pass through the garden gate out onto the moors, where my uncle was already running desperately. We must have been a strange sight on that early October morning; my uncle running in desperate bounds, his dressing-gown flapping about his lean legs and his white hair streaming wildly; the heavy pugilist thrashing along some feet behind, and Shirley and I, both stocking-footed and disheveled, panting in the rear.

I did not dare use my pistol, but I called to the man to stop. He paid no attention; I doubt if he heard me, so there was nothing to do but to keep on, trusting that I would arrive in time. My uncle was making toward the wharf, and I couldn't imagine what his idea was.

At that moment my foot twisted on a stone, and I came down heavily with a jar that shook my very senses. When I picked myself up again, Shirley was beside me.

"Are you hurt?" she asked anxiously.

"No, no, let us go on," I answered impatiently, and we hurried on ahead. Both our uncle and the man had disappeared over the brow of the hill, and when I reached it, I looked down anxiously, fearing the worst. Uncle Gregory was in the boat-house working like mad to get the power-boat free, while the man was stumbling down the rocks toward him with malevolent purpose.

Twice Uncle Gregory threw the motor over and it failed to start, but at last I heard the familiar *putt-putt* as it began to work. The man heard it, too, and gave a leap that landed him on the wharf; then, as

Uncle Gregory turned to cast off the rope, he sprang on him.

Shirley screamed and I raised my pistol, but I dared not fire for fear I should hit my uncle. But he knew how to take care of himself; as the man sprang, Uncle Gregory caught up a heavy wrench and struck him squarely on the head. He gave a queer, strangled cry, and dropped down on the wharf.

Quite coolly, Uncle Gregory cast off the rope and took the wheel of the power-boat. As it curved gracefully out into the harbor and headed for the distant ocean I recovered from my stupefaction, and called out:

"The man is harmless. You can come back now!"

If my uncle heard me he paid no attention, and together we watched the boat slip over the sun-yellowed waves, making steadily for the open sea. Only as I still looked, I half fancied that I saw the flicker of a white hand for an instant in what almost seemed to be an ironical farewell.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### PETER.

SO quick had been the whole action I have described, and so unexpected was my uncle's disappearance, that Shirley and I remained staring at each other, all processes of reason stricken from our minds. Then the reaction came; in spite of the doubtful situation, and the dangers that might still be in wait for us, the ludicrous side of the situation swept over us and we burst out into spontaneous laughter.

For fully five minutes we stood and shook with a merriment that relieved the tension and animosity of the past two days more effectually than anything else could have done. Suddenly, the man lying on the dock before us moved slightly and groaned; Shirley sobered instantly, and she and I bent over him.

"It seems so heartless to laugh," she sighed, "but I just had to, you looked so funny standing there in your stocking feet with your hair all rumpled up and that silly struck look on your face."

"Well, I didn't look any more funny than you," I retorted good-naturedly, glad to have her speak to me in the old comradely way. "I think we deserve a laugh after all we have been through, and, anyway, he's not dead."

Privately, I would not have been sorry to have been rid of him, but it might have been troublesome to be left with a corpse on our hands. I'm afraid Shirley read my thoughts, for she looked at me with some return of her old coldness.

"He's badly hurt; we shall have to get him up to the house at once."

I groaned at the prospect of having to carry this disreputable ruffian a second time up to the house. It would have been absurd if it was not so irritating; and all at once I felt heartily sick of the whole affair, and conscious that I was both exceedingly stiff from my gymnastics on the window-sill, and very hungry.

As far as I could see, the situation was not pleasant; here we were left alone again, this time to have to explain both the disappearance of my uncle and the appearance of his assailant. There were many things about each that I wanted to think over carefully, but this was not the time nor the place. I bent over the man and was just in the act of lifting him up, when the sound of oarlocks made me stop.

With the hope that it was my uncle coming back again, I turned to stare in that direction; but a moment's glance showed me that it was not he. The boat was an ordinary row-boat, and the man in it, I could see even from this distance, was no one I knew. Shirley, too, was looking at him puzzledly, and I could see no recognition in her face.

He came on steadily, not even pausing to look back of him to direct his course, but rowing like a man who knows his way well. Only when he was about fifty feet off, did he turn, and then I saw that he was an elderly man with stooping shoulders and grizzled hair. Poor man, he must have had a shock when he saw us standing there, a strange disheveled group. His eyes fairly stuck out, and his jaw dropped as he stopped rowing and drifted alongside.

"Who are you?" I called out. "If you

want to see Mr. Deane he has just gone away."

My words seemed to have an extraordinary effect upon him, he picked up his oars and began rowing so feverishly that he bumped into the pier, and fell sprawling on his back in the middle of the boat. I had to catch the painter and help him up on the dock, where he stood gasping for breath.

"Where—where is Mr. Gregory?" he got out at last.

I shook my head.

"I'm blest if I know," I returned flip-pantly. "He's made off for parts unknown. And who are you?"

He continued to gasp and look at me for all the world like an ancient clam.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Carlos Brent, Mr. Deane's great-nephew. Who the dickens are *you*?"

His face lost some of its anxious look.

"I'm Peter. Oh, Mr. Brent, I'm so glad you are here."

He could not have been any more glad to see me than I was to see him. Here at last was some one who might be expected to explain some of the matters that were troubling me; in fact, one could not look at Peter's honest, square face with its respectable side whiskers, without gaining a comfortable sense of law and order.

He seemed as far removed from all this mystery and violence as could possibly be imagined, and I felt as though he should take my hat and coat, if I had had one, and usher me into the drawing-room in the most approved family servant style. To see him standing there, still gasping from his exertion of rowing, his eyes filled with fear, glancing around him, came as a distinct shock to this reassuring vision.

"For God's sake, sir," he went on, "where did Mr. Deane go? Didn't he leave any word for me? He said he would, if—" He broke off.

"He hadn't time," I remarked rather dryly. "When a man is chasing you with the evident intention of choking you to death, you are not apt to waste time in farewell messages."

Peter's face grew so white that I thought he was going to faint.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed. "Has he come? Surely he would stop at murder!"

"I don't think he meant to stop at anything." Uncle Gregory was fortunate enough to get the blow in first, and there he is."

I pointed to the unconscious man, who was lying behind Shirley and had been, so far, hidden from Peter.

He went over and looked at him timidly, then started back with an exclamation.

"This isn't him I meant, I don't know who he is, but he's surely a dreadful looking creature. Who is he, and what are we going to do with him, sir?"

"I can tell you who he is," said Shirley's cool, clear voice behind us. "He is an ex-prizefighter known as 'Clinch' Murphy, and he used to be an associate of my—the man you are speaking of. I don't know what his purpose was in coming, or why he should have tried to murder my great-uncle; but the fact remains that the man is seriously hurt and must be got to the house at once.

"Will you help Mr. Brent take him there? I am Mr. Deane's great-niece, Miss Deane."

I couldn't help but admire the cool, confident way in which she took charge of affairs, and evidently Peter was also impressed, for he accepted her lead as a matter of course.

"Certainly, miss. We'll get him to the house, and then, perhaps, you and Mr. Brent will be good enough to give me some more idea as to what has happened."

Accordingly, we both took hold of the unconscious man and got him up to the house quite comfortably, where we laid him in the same room he had occupied before, Shirley having discovered the key in a corner of the hall evidently where it had been thrown.

"Begging your pardon, sir, it don't seem to me that he's so much hurt as in liquor," said Peter with a sniff of disapproval. "He is fair reeking of it."

"Why, I don't know where he could have gotten any," I began, and then stopped, for I remembered the whisky flask my uncle had left in the room for me.

A glance showed it to me nearly empty, on the floor.

The man must have taken a good swig of it before he climbed down from the window. It had probably only given him an unusual spurt of strength, for I didn't see how that amount of whiskey could have made any man—who was used to it—drunk.

"Well, Peter, whatever it is, he is quiet enough at present, but as he is a very dangerous man when he is awake, suppose we take a turn or two of this rope around his arms and legs. Now, then, you tell me your story first; then, I will tell you mine and—by the way, have you got such a thing as a cigarette or some tobacco on you? I am absolutely dying for a smoke."

Peter grinned in an understanding way, and produced a package of cigarettes which he offered me.

"I understand how it is, sir, I get taken that way myself. It is a bad habit, as Mr. Deane says, but it's a great comfort to a man in times like these—only"—he glanced around nervously as he spoke—"perhaps you'd better not smoke here—Mr. Deane doesn't allow it. I go into the cellar for mine."

"Mr. Deane isn't here, now," I said coolly, as I lit a cigarette and took a long breath. "Jove! these are good cigarettes—I thought you only smoked a pipe."

"I do when I'm here, but when I go off, I buy these cigarettes as a sort of a treat, sir."

"And bring back a good supply to keep the 'treat' going, eh?" I laughed. "See here, Peter, you must have one of your own cigarettes to keep me company."

He protested, but I finally persuaded him to take one while he talked. Even then, he kept glancing around from time to time as if he expected to see his irate master appear suddenly.

"I left here Tuesday morning," he said. "My sister was took ill very sudden in Boston, and Mr. Deane gave me leave to go for the day. She got worse and died, and I sent a telegram to Mr. Deane telling him as how I had to stay on to the funeral. Then, when I was ready to come back the next day, the storm was too bad and I had to wait till yesterday afternoon."

"When I landed, they told me as how the bridge here had been blown down by the storm, and I decided to wait until this morning when it would be calmer and row around from Tom Davis's landing, two miles below. He's a sort of a cousin of mine on my mother's side, and not much of a credit to the family, anyhow, if I may be excused for saying so. Not that he isn't good-hearted; he offered to take me over here in his power-boat, but I know Mr. Deane never likes any one hanging around here or even coming into the cove, so I just borrowed a boat and rowed over myself."

"You got an early start," I observed as he stopped for breath.

"I always wake early, sir, and along about five I got a sort of feeling that everything wasn't just right over to the house here, and I couldn't wait no longer. As soon as it was light, I took the boat and came over, thinking I'd slip in and get breakfast ready as a sort of surprise to Mr. Gregory."

"And you'll have a chance to do that soon, for I'm as hungry as a horse; but, first, I want you to tell me a few things. You spoke of 'he' being here; has Mr. Deane been in fear of any one that you know of?"

"Yes, sir," answered Peter without any hesitation. "It's that nephew of his, drat his worthless soul! Excuse me, sir but I get angry when I think how he has kept Mr. Gregory worried all these years with begging letters threats and what not."

"We haven't heard from him for over two years, and then Mr. Gregory got a letter one morning recently. He looked sour when he read it and he said to me: 'Well, Peter, he's out of jail again, so we had better look out for ourselves.' It was then we got the dog, and had the window fastenings fixed up. Now, sir, do tell me what has happened while I've been gone."

"Wait a moment; do you know just what was the reason Mr. Deane feared a visit from his nephew?"

"Well, sir, as far as I could make out from what he told me, it was on account of some letter or paper of his that Mr. Deane had and which he kept as a sort of hold over him. Now, sir, if you will be so good."

I was satisfied, for his story explained several things that had been puzzling me: Peter's prolonged absence, and the fact that no one had come over to us by boat. So I told Peter the whole story; of our arriving to find the apparently empty house; my struggle with the burglar the first night; the finding of the wrecked boat the next day; and the man's attempt to choke Uncle Gregory that night; my search of the house and finding the passageway the day following; and finally the arrival of "Clinch Murphy," the breaking open of the safe, and Clinch's attack upon my uncle which caused his flight.

It made quite a tale; and as Peter was a splendid audience, I outdid myself, ending in a burst of dramatic effect that left poor Peter's eyes fairly goggling out, and his mouth opening and shutting more clam-like than ever.

"It's dreadful!" he exclaimed. "To think of all these things happening in this quiet house, and me away! The poor young lady must have been scared to death. Why, you might have been all choked to death in your beds."

"It wasn't my Uncle Richard's fault that we weren't," I observed dryly. "He certainly kept us on the jump most of the time, and he managed to do the disappearing act very successfully. I hope he has cleared out for good, now that he has what he wanted."

"I hope so, indeed, sir," echoed Peter hastily. "But what I can't understand is why Mr. Deane hasn't come back yet. He must surely know that he would be safe now."

I thought I understood pretty well why he hadn't come back and might not for several hours. There had been no mistaking Clinch Murphy's intention; if ever a man meant murder he did, and I considered Uncle Gregory very sensible in making off—as he undoubtedly had done, to the town to get assistance, even though he had rather cold-bloodedly left us to deal with the situation.

After all, though, he had stunned the man and left him helpless, and as he seemed to be only after Uncle Gregory's blood and not ours, it was not so selfish as it seemed.

So I told myself, but there were several things about the affair that still puzzled me, and deep down in my mind there would lurk a suspicion that Shirley knew more about the matter than she had told.

I didn't for an instant think that she was in league with her father, for her words to my great-uncle in the library carried the ring of conviction, but he might have terrorized her into shielding him to a certain extent. Had she locked my door? The ease with which she had found the key recurred to me unpleasantly.

I pulled myself up with a jerk. Hang it all, I was becoming suspicious of everybody and everything since I had been in this cursed house. I needed a bath, a shave, and some breakfast to restore my normal outlook. Then I would consider the matter from all its angles.

"Peter," I said to that person who was watching me anxiously, "now is the psychological moment for you to spring that little surprise of yours. Or to be exact, in about forty minutes we will be down in the kitchen ready for almost anything, only let there be lots of it."

"Very good, sir," answered Peter brightening like one who sees a familiar path opening before him. "I'll get you a breakfast as will make you wish you hadn't to wait forty minutes for."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### DREAMING.

I WAS bathed shaved and clothed, well within the allotted time, and felt myself again. Before I went down, I tapped on Shirley's door.

"Come down" I called gayly. "There's going to be a real breakfast."

There was no reply, but I thought I heard a choked sob. I listened, and heard another.

"Shirley, what is it?" I cried. "Can't I help you?"

After a moment she answered in a muffled voice:

"No, thank you. Please—please go away."

There was nothing else to do but go

away, so I went on down-stairs very much disturbed in my mind. It was not like Shirley to do this, and it stirred up again the uneasy doubts I had hoped were finally laid.

Was there something she regretted having done, or was it merely the reaction of the night's events? I was so filled with these thoughts that I failed to do full justice to Peter's excellent breakfast, much to his disappointment.

"Isn't the young lady coming down, sir?" he ventured when I had refused a second helping of nearly everything. "I've prepared an omelet for her, all ladies generally prefer omelets."

"No," I answered briefly, "but if you will put some stuff for her on a tray I'll carry it up."

Accordingly Peter prepared a most tempting breakfast, daintily arranged on a tray to which, after a little hesitation, I added a spray of late yellow chrysanthemums I had found growing in the garden. I took this up to her hoping that by this time she was more calm.

I might have spared myself any anxiety; she was fully dressed, and very much composed when she opened the door to my knock, and there was no trace of any emotion in the cold politeness with which she thanked me only, I fancied a fleeting shade of softness in her face as her eyes fell on the spray of flowers. She was closing the door when a sudden thought made her reopen it.

"How is the—man?" she asked with a nod of her head in the direction of the room where Clinch Murphy lay.

"About the same I think. I haven't been in since we left him tied up there." A sudden impulse made me add: "The door isn't locked this time."

She caught the point with a quick flush.

"I know, but in view of the position I'm in here, I didn't care to go in and see for myself. You might think I was planning another burglary with him as a confederate."

"Shirley!" I exclaimed, and she had the grace to blush again and drop her eyes. "I never thought you had anything to do with this whole mess—willingly. It's only

that I am sure you are keeping something back that might help us if we knew it. Won't you tell me?"

She shook her head, but her tone was decidedly softer.

"It wouldn't make anything clearer, it would only confuse things still more. Will you do something for me?"

"If I can."

"Please send for a doctor as soon as possible and let him look after the man, for I think he is in a bad way. And will you believe me when I tell you that he isn't as bad as you think?"

I smiled rather grimly.

"I'm afraid you will find it rather hard to convince Uncle Gregory that the fellow's intentions in regard to him were altogether friendly. I don't believe I should like that kind of friendliness, myself."

"I don't quite understand that," she said with a puzzled frown "unless his mind was affected by the first blow—or he mistook him for some one else."

"Both sound fairly reasonable. We'll let it go at that, and I'll promise to do all I can for your friendly prize-fighter. Will that do?"

She gave me a smile then in reply, and I felt that matters were going better than I had hoped.

"Thank you" she said and closed the door.

I went in to take a look at our subject of discussion, and found him much the same. I'm no doctor, but I've seen plenty of knocks and had them too and after examining his head carefully I couldn't see any real cause for this continued unconsciousness. His head was hard enough to have been often thumped before with impunity.

Shirley was right, however; something must be done for him, and soon. Now that Peter was here to look after things, I could leave without any worry on Shirley's account. I felt confident that, having once obtained the paper he had worked so hard to get, Richard Deane would not linger any more about the place. He could easily have swum or rowed across by now.

Still, Peter could handle him, especially if armed with the formidable old pistol I

had seen him cleaning when I peered into the kitchen after breakfast. I decided that I would take Peter's boat and row over to the town, where I would doubtless find Uncle Gregory and be able to assure him that he might return safely.

It was about nine thirty, and a brilliant, cool day outside promised to put some life into my expedition. It was a relief to see the sun shine once more, and I felt that a brisk row would drive away all these troublesome mysteries. I needed it, for I felt unusually stupid—from my disturbed night, I suppose, and it was with an effort that I pulled myself together to make the trip.

As I passed the table on my way out of the room, I noticed the whisky-bottle standing there and it occurred to me that a small drink might brace me up, so I took a swallow from the bottle before I remembered that Murphy had done the same thing, and put it down hastily.

On going out into the hall, I noticed that the door of my uncle's room was slightly ajar, and I don't know what impulse made me stop and go in. Perhaps it was because I wanted to see if all was right; at all events, I went in and looked around.

The room was as it had been on my first and only visit; but two things struck me at once as unusual: the bed had not been slept in; and a heavy dresser had been moved from its position, and put in another corner of the room; where it stood rather awkwardly just in front of a closet door.

The first was not so unnatural; my great-uncle had anticipated an attack last night and had doubtless been sitting up to watch for it; but I couldn't see the sense of the other.

I sat down in an old horse-hair rocker to consider the matter, for my legs felt unaccountably tired. My thoughts soon drifted off, however, back to Shirley: what was this thing that she did not want to tell me, and which, to use her own words, 'would only confuse matters still more?' I felt quite sure that she knew more than the rest of us and wished that she would speak. It seemed I had made a mess of securing her friendship, and she would never believe that I didn't share Uncle Gregory's suspicions.

He wouldn't leave her the money, now, that was sure, but I didn't feel so certain that I was the winner. Even though I had been more in his confidence than Shirley, I couldn't feel that he really trusted me. For the tenth time I cursed the money and the necessity of getting it. I would much rather have lost the money than Shirley.

Hang it all, was I in love with her? I tried to wrench my thoughts away, and make myself get up and go about the business in hand, instead of dreaming in this sentimental fashion; but my body felt as heavy as lead and my head dizzy. I leaned back against the chair, and closed my eyes.

I must have slept, for I had a most remarkable dream. While I sat there in the chair, Peter and Clinch crept in and bound me hand and foot to it; then Peter covered me all over with an egg batter which hardened rapidly until I was like a plaster cast. I knew, in the queer way one knows in dreams, that they could do me no harm; but, when Peter suggested that they carry me down and bake me in the oven, I struggled and tried to get free, filled with intense horror at my impending fate.

Also with the quick imagination of dreams, that leap from one idea to another with the speed and lack of direction of lightning, I already felt the heat curling me up stiffer and stiffer, and my red-hot buttons pressing into my flesh. These, and a hot band that began to tighten around my head, were what gave me the greatest distress, and I began a desperate struggle to get free.

Only in one hand did I retain any life, and with it I kept up a weak tapping in the hopes of obtaining rescue. It was all in vain, however, and I felt myself getting stiffer and more helpless.

"I think he's done now," remarked Peter to his grinning confederate, "but we'll stick a fork into him, and see."

To my wild horror, he advanced with a huge teasing-fork nearly six feet long, which he held over me. Just then, to my intense relief, I heard Shirley tapping outside on the door and asking what was the matter. By a mighty effort I found my voice and cried loudly:

"Come in, come in, they are murdering me!" But the door was locked and the huge fork descended toward me; it touched me, and I could already feel its tines piercing into my imprisoned flesh.

Then I awoke. Absurd as the dream was, it had been so vividly real that I could not shake it off at once, and sat for a

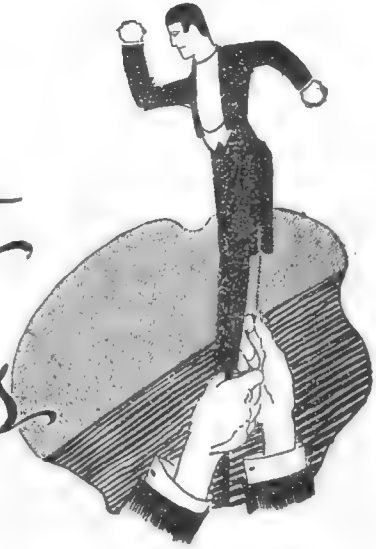
minute under its spell, drenched with perspiration, my heart beating excitedly in great throbs.

It seemed to me that Shirley was still tapping on the door, very softly and irregularly, but persistently. Only it was not in the direction of the hall that the tapping came.

**This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**

# Entirely Without Notes

by Jack Bechdolt



SOME hundreds of men and women in the United States to-day were made famous as Walter Bowman was, by the skilled brains of men and women entirely unknown to fame. The paste jewels in their intellectual crowns gleam just as brightly under the artificial light of publicity as the real jewels of the men and women who earned their fame by their own efforts.

Every newspaper reader knows at least a score of them by name. Either they are rich in their own right or hold prominent places in the business world. They are, sometimes, the banquet speaker whose remarks on "Some Economic Aspects of the Proposed League of Nations" are good for a half column of Sunday review; sometimes the purchaser of a "Rubens" or "Velasquez" who supplies the Sunday feature writer with a column or so about "Bol-

shevism in our Native American Art;" sometimes a clubman or clubwoman noted for shrewdly humorous anecdotes; sometimes the author of a little book on almost any subject not strictly utilitarian; some of them are popular contributors to the humorous columns of metropolitan newspapers. Their names become familiar to hundreds of thousands of their fellow citizens, yes, even to millions, who remember them with a friendly smile or a brief tribute of surprised admiration, all due to the industry, cleverness or brilliance of somebody else who has been hired to do their thinking.

That's the sort of famous man Walter Bowman became.

Several million people came to know him and like him and through liking him to become more tolerant of the great corporation he represented. Not more than a

dozen out of the several millions who still admire Bowman, know that what was admired and liked about him was the borrowed genius of Eddy Denby, masquerading under Bowman's name.

Eddy Denby was Walter Bowman's "ghost," that being the trade name for the brains hired to make a dull man brilliant. He was accounted one of the best ghosts known to paid publicity, and besides that, he was a mighty nice fellow, and he and Bowman thought a great deal of each other.

Understand, Walter Bowman didn't seek to buy fame from any motive of vanity. So far as he was concerned he had never asked from life more than the opportunity to pay for his moderate wants and a modest slice of happiness. If he did not become famous actually against his will, at least he entered the limelight—or was pushed in—to his considerable surprise.

Oscar Hayden, head of America's greatest advertising agency and probably the world's greatest genius in publicity, said to the directors of the Metropolitan Light, Heat, Power and Traction Corporation, "Find me a man—a man not past forty—hitherto unknown to the public; a man who knows enough to hold his tongue and let somebody else do his public thinking for him; neither a brilliant man nor a fool; if he has the ability to help run your business so much the better, but the other qualities are first consideration. Find me that man." And the directors found for him Walter Bowman. At the dictation of old Oscar Hayden they made Walter Bowman head of one of the biggest corporations in America.

For various reasons men become successful. Walter Bowman won success because he was not yet forty years old; a fairly good looking, steady, industrious, loyal fellow; he held no radical opinions; was willing to let his public thinking be done for him, and showed the makings of a very good executive. Hitherto he had been a minor executive, one of a number of promising young men working for the Metropolitan Light, Heat, Power and Traction Corporation. In a stroke he was jumped over the heads of probably a score of

seniors and within three years the public had forgotten the corporation name entirely. When it thought of light, heat, power or traction it thought "Bowman."

Oscar Hayden is one of the few living men who can do a thing like that—a modern miracle.

The directors of the Metropolitan followed his dictation not because they wanted to, but because they could think of no other remedy for their troubles, which were plenty and multiplying like Belgian hares.

The Metropolitan was in bad with the public and getting in worse at increasing ratio. When Hayden was called in for advice it was probably the worst hated corporation in a nation of big business. It had recently lost a franchise worth five millions of dollars and was threatened with the loss of others worth five times as much and the reason for that, as Hayden told the directors, was that the corporation had forfeited public good-will.

Good-will, one of the vital principles of business, is as easily lost as a woman's fair name—and as hard to win back. To win this favor for the hated Metropolitan, Oscar Hayden set all his machinery of publicity to work to the end that the public forgot the corporation name and remembered the name Bowman. And of this man Bowman, Hayden's skilled workers, particularly Eddy Denby, made a public character that was a clever blend of the sterling patriotism of Washington, the shrewd democracy of Lincoln and the eloquence of Patrick Henry; it was a character flavored with the philanthropy of George W. Childs; it had that same love of the beautiful and fine things in art that characterized the late J. P. Morgan; in literature it could write with the dignity of Carlyle, but was not above doing a limerick in the manner of our best metropolitan columnists; and withal this mythical Bowman was as common, as familiar and as likable as the cop who patrols the block.

And gradually everybody connected with this business, except perhaps Eddy Denby, forgot there was really a human being named Walter Bowman who was none of these things—only a nice, quiet, likable chap who was getting a trifle bald and

wondering what to do about it; who was subject to colds and toothache as we all are and dreaded dentists; who sometimes said angry things or foolish things, and wished next morning he hadn't; who liked cream and a lump of sugar in his coffee and hated castor oil; who preferred a bad-smelling pipe to rich cigars and could curse a collar that bound his necktie as fluently as any longshoreman.

They all forgot the real Walter Bowman at times—all save Bowman himself.

## II.

WALTER BOWMAN had several secretaries. There was the young man in his outer office who wore horn-rimmed spectacles, little more than a glorified office boy who took your card to Miss Smith, whose office was next to Bowman's. Miss Smith was the human filter. She made it her business to interview seventy-five per cent. of Bowman's callers. The remaining twenty-five per cent. talked with Filkins, Bowman's confidential secretary, and some of them with Bowman himself. There was a personal stenographer in addition, who wrote all Bowman's letters. And finally there was Eddy Denby.

Denby was unknown in the Metropolitan offices. He never came there.

On Broadway, half-way up Manhattan Island, in a building largely devoted to cloak and suit wholesalers, resident buyers and fashion magazines, Denby had a little office behind a door which bore no name. There he kept a typewriter and a large filing case. He had another little room set aside for his personal use in Bowman's flat on Madison Avenue.

Almost any time of day or night he might have been discovered in one or the other of these places when he was not at the research department of the public library—a tall, freckled young man, lean, red haired, stooping painfully over a small typewriter at which he poked with three fingers and a thumb, strewing half-burned cigarettes in a semicircle about his desk.

Eddie Denby did not know everything, but he knew where and how to find out about anything, which was why he earned

a generous salary. Once he had a few facts on a subject he could write about it in one or the other styles which the reading public admired as the work of Walter Bowman; or he could prompt Bowman to talk about it with satisfactory brilliance.

In Bowman's name he wrote letters to the papers advocating more playgrounds for children and free milk stations for babies. He prepared Bowman's little chat on "The Municipal Ownership Bogey and Its Effect on Modern Traction Financing," delivered before the Bankers' Association convention and his illuminating discussion called, "Some Significant Sidelights on Stress and Tensile Strength of Modern Steel and Concrete Construction as Demonstrated in Building the New North Hudson Power Dam," which Bowman delivered before an international congress of engineers.

Shortly after the close of the war he arranged Bowman's purchase of eight famous paintings by old masters from European owners and later engineered their private sale so that Bowman made enough from six of them to afford to give one to the Metropolitan Museum and save another for his private enjoyment, to say nothing of the profits in publicity. He saw that Bowman met the right people and said the right things to them, and if he said the wrong thing, as he occasionally did, Denby saw that the public didn't hear about it.

It speaks well for both men that they remained always close friends. Bowman had a fortunate sense of humor and was beautifully lacking in vanity. He never took the bit in his teeth and tried to outshine his anonymous mental guardian as other men of his kind have sometimes done, to their discomfiture. He regarded Denby's constant presence and advice purely as a business proposition, a part of his duty toward the Metropolitan.

And on his part Denby was singularly free from petty envy. Denby never craved to play Bowman's rôle and take the credit for his own brilliance.

They called each other Eddy and Walter; went about together quite a lot; went fishing together in their old clothes when they could steal a few days from business;

played a little golf and conducted an interminable tournament at pinocle.

Then came an evening when they went to a rather brilliant social function and each fell hopelessly in love with a different woman, both of them beautiful women, brainy women, brilliant women.

### III.

A WEEK or ten days after this momentous evening Bowman lingered at the door of the little room in his flat where Denby worked. His freckled friend was half buried in a stack of fat books, dipping here and there and making copious notes. Bowman hesitated uneasily, several times started to go and several times returned to lean against the door frame.

"Eddy, I'm going to make a call," he said at last.

Denby remarked "uhuh," and kept on reading and jotting down notes.

"On Miss Sally Ames," Bowman added.

"Uhuh." After a little Denby looked up and added: "Been seeing a good deal of her, eh?"

"I wish I could see her a great deal oftener. I wish I never had to take my eyes off her. I wish—" Bowman stopped and reddened from his immaculate white collar to the roots of his brown hair.

Denby looked at him with a ready grin, then looked away with a rare delicacy. "I see," he said slowly, "I see! h-m." He lighted another cigarette with careful deliberation and smoked it half-way through. "Well, why don't you?" he went on. "Why don't you? She's a fine girl—a mighty fine girl. And a brainy one. You're well suited, with your common interest in painting and sculpture—"

"Don't!" Bowman growled quickly. "You know what a damn lie that is. My interest in painting and sculpture! A cheap, rotten pose, that's what it is. What do I know about art? What!" Bowman clenched his fists and breathed hard. Then he burst out again, answering his own question: "I know exactly what you've dug up out of books for me, that's what I know. Not one damn thing more. Art? what do I care for art! But she, Miss

Ames, she got the idea I know a lot—on account of those silly newspaper stories about the Cellini ewer and those paintings I—we—juggled around. And she knows everything about art. She's a nut on the subject. That attracted her to me—she says so herself. And I'm committed—I'm in deep—over my head. And I've got to swim—to keep on swimming, on and on through a sea of lies until I choke to death!"

Bowman stopped breathless, red of face, his chest heaving, his face desperate with woe.

"And when I do choke to death," he burst out again, "when I give myself away, because I'm bound to give myself away, what's she going to think of me then? What's she going to think of a rotten cheat and fraud and liar like me! What?"

Eddy Denby didn't volunteer what Miss Sally Ames would think of his friend when she found him out so Bowman went on: "I'm ashamed of myself. I'm disgusted with this rotten pretense. For a nickel I'd go jump in the river, that's what, because I—I'd rather have her good opinion than be the Lord Almighty. And I've lied to her and she's bound to find me out and I'll never get that good opinion!"

"Well," said Denby thoughtfully, touched by his friend's unhappiness, "if she did happen to return your—er—flattering regard, it wouldn't be exactly because of art, anyhow. She'd probably fall in love with you—"

"She won't ever love a liar. She's not that kind of a girl," Bowman said fiercely.

"Maybe. But suppose you could skate along for a while, until you'd won her. After you were married, why—well, maybe it wouldn't look so serious. Why, I can dig up enough dope to keep you going, Walter. Sure. Now, for instance, to-night, let's see now, let's see! Here's a good one, Walter, here's a deep one that 'll wear like a steel tire. Try her on the similarity of principles of composition in painting, sculpture, music and verse. Now listen to me, get the idea. It's a good one."

Bowman listened carefully while his friend and ghost drilled him in the essentials of a conversational topic designed to

conceal a lot that he did not know. At length he promised, rather gloomily, to follow Denby's advice.

"But it's wrong, all wrong," he protested. "It's a rotten lie—and I've got a hunch in my bones I'm going to be found out. And then—"

"Yes, but listen, Walter. No woman marries a man because of his occult knowledge of the fine arts. She takes him for other and more personal reasons—"

Bowman burst out bitterly, "Exactly! And she's not the sort of woman to think much of a false alarm. That's what I am, a sort of fancy Easter egg, all scrolls and gilding outside and blown clean and empty. Oh, well, Eddy, I'll follow your scheme. And thanks to you. You're a good sort. What are you digging at, by the way? Am I due for another speech?"

Now it was Denby's turn to redden and look uncomfortable. "No—nothing for you," he admitted. "Looking up some dope on ceramics and basketry. Trying to prove that the natives of Alaska and British Columbia originally came from Asia by tracing out their decorative designs—it's a hell of a job, if you must know it!"

"Ceramics? Oh!" Bowman began to grin. "Lydia Crawford, that friend of Miss Ames, is interested in ceramics, I think?"

"She's writing a book about 'em."

"It looks as if you were writing it."

"Not at all," Denby protested quickly, "not at all! Just helping a little. I happened to spring this theory on her just to be saying something. Now I'm paying for my damfoolishness. She wants to put it in the book."

"She's a wonderful woman, Eddy. Beautiful, brilliant, gracious. How many women d'you see with her money and social position who take the trouble to be of some use in the world? To think for themselves? To do things? And you made a hit with her, you lucky dog."

"Lucky! That's your idea of luck?"

"You mean there's no chance she'll care for you?"

"I don't know about that. Maybe she would, I don't dare ask her; I simply don't dare!"

Denby tipped back in his chair and glared unhappily at the ceiling. He added finally, "I tell you I'm unhappy, bitterly, damnably unhappy. I'm in love with a woman, just as badly hit as anybody ever was—and scared to death to try my luck for fear I'll win her. Every last, little thing about Lydia Crawford sets me crazy with joy—her hair, the way she carries her chin so high, her smile, the way she uses her hands, that thoroughbred air of hers—every last little thing makes me dippy with delight, *except her brains*. God deliver me from a woman with brains!"

Bowman stared mightily. He demanded. "What's all this rot? You love her and you're afraid she might love you! What's all this about brains? You talk like this new-fangled free verse!"

"I mean just what I say," Denby insisted. "I love Miss Crawford, but I hate brilliant women. I do, I hate 'em. Any man like me who marries a woman as bright or brighter than he is—is a plain fool. He'll never be happy in a million years. It just can't happen, at least not with me. Why, look, Walter, I've got some ambitions to shine on my own account some day. Some day I want to be Eddy Denby, not the human ouija board that produces all the wise things you tell the public. You can't blame me for that, can you, Walter?"

"I've always told you you should cut loose and do something for yourself," Bowman agreed quickly.

"And so I shall. But if I marry the brilliant Lydia Crawford, just assuming for sake of argument that I *could*, well, where the devil do I get off? I'm the brilliant Lydia Crawford's husband, that's my station!"

Denby lighted another cigarette, glared savagely at it and threw it into a corner untasted. "Something tells me she's the only woman I'll ever love—and my common sense tells me we could never be happy," he muttered. "Why, oh, why did the good Lord give the only woman I want more brains than I've got!"

Denby looked miserable, no denying it. Bowman could see he meant what he said, though he had a hard time making out just

what it was he meant. He managed to say finally with as much charity as he could summon: "Well, Eddy, I always knew you were a nut. Just a plain nut. Hard shelled. A nut."

"All right; I am a nut. But I know enough to know I could never be happy married to that woman—and I'll never be happy without her—and if you think it's any fun being that kind of a nut, you've got a lot to learn about nuts. I wish I had died back in 1776!"

#### IV.

THE home of Miss Sally Ames was a flat cleverly remodeled from part of an old-time brownstone house to the east of Fifth Avenue in the Seventies. There was not much of it beside the living-room, but that had such an air of gracious hospitality, good taste and a catholic interest in the fine arts that it spoke eloquently of the charms of the girl who owned it.

The room was large and, this evening, lighted with shaded lamps that gave it a charming richness. The furniture was of no special period but all of it comfortable. The rugs were rather well worn, but they were good rugs. There was a beautiful old grand piano and cases of books old and new. On the walls hung several very good paintings, the work of living artists not particularly famous to-day, though some day they may become "old masters." There was a glowing fire of cannel coal on the plain old hearth that added vastly to the cheerfulness.

Altogether, it was a room that seemed to have been used much and much enjoyed, haunted by the ghosts of many an evening as delightful as this—a legion of sane, pleasant, well-mannered, clever ghosts, the sort of ghosts one would care to know.

Obviously Miss Sally Ames was not a particularly rich young woman, nor exactly impoverished. Bowman understood that she followed the profession of literature to earn a living, though he did not know exactly what she wrote.

Miss Ames leaned forward so that the glow of a piano lamp threw a mystery around her clever and beautiful face and

made a little halo out of her closely bound hair. She was evidently hanging on the words of Walter Bowman.

Bowman was rolling a page of sheet-music between his fingers as he spoke. "It is an interesting idea when you get the notion of it! I don't know, it sort of fascinates me, y' know. When you trace out the melody line of a song with a pencil and compare it with the old Greek lines of beauty and grace, or the Japanese stuff, the resemblance kind of startles you. Then finding the same thing in poetry, you noticed? There's a sort of principle behind it, something that makes you think of rhythm—and infinite space—and the planets and things all going around in appointed paths—I don't know, it's kind of funny, don't you think?"

Bowman stopped and sighed a sigh that seemed to come all the way from six feet one inch beneath the crown of his head. There was no satisfaction in that sigh. It carried a little tremolo of fear and guilty conscience, and yet Eddy Denby's topic had won him the lady's attention for a good hour and a half. It had every ear-mark of a great success.

"It is kind of funny," he repeated lamely.

"I think that idea is simply wonderful." Sally Ames said it slowly, her air enraptured. "It's big—a great big corking notion! Why, Walter Bowman, that's bully stuff. You've no idea how much I admire a business man like you who can find time to think out big things like that—things about the finer things in life!"

Bowman squirmed uneasily. His usually rather placid face showed signs of wrinkling, like the face of an unhappy small boy. He tried to stop her with a wave of the hand.

But Sally Ames insisted on talking. "I want to tell you that I do admire you—I admire your broad mind, your catholic tastes in the fine arts; your undoubtedly brilliant critical ability—"

"Oh, please! I feel like a fool—"

"But you know so much! I can't help but pay a little tribute. You know so many things—"

Bowman groaned. "Stop!" he said.

He rose, and his voice was hoarse and uncertain.

"Listen, you've got to listen to me, Sally Ames. I—I can't stand this any longer. It's all a lie, a miserable cheat. I've got to get this off my chest, then I'll go away and never insult you by coming near you again. I'm not bright, Sally. I'm not the kind of chap you think I am. I'm just a mutt, a kind of yellow mutt that buys other people's brains and passes them off for his own. That's all I am, just a crook with stolen brains."

There were beads of sweat on Bowman's face. It hurt him to tell the truth, but he went on with a fine sort of stubbornness. "All that bright stuff you admired, Sally, all that—that's Eddy Denby's brains. Every one of those ideas belong to Denby. Poor devil, it's his job to make me appear like a regular, honest-to-goodness brainy man. And I'm not. Not in the least. Never will be. All this stuff about art, for instance—a pose, that's all. Art? I don't give a damn for nine-tenths of the art I see. Sometimes I see something I like, that's all I care about it. The rest is bunk. Music and literature, all the rest of it the same. I say what Eddy tells me to say. I stole Eddy's idea to-night, just to make a hit with you. But I can't stand lying any more. I can't stand it because—" Bowman hesitated a little. When he finally spoke he had a proper pride in the confession, "I love you too dearly, Sally, to try to fool you any longer. Now, good-by."

Bowman was half-way out of the room, blindly intent on finding his hat and coat when Sally's exclamation halted him.

"Thank God," she cried, and he saw she was on her feet, her face radiant, her arms outstretched.

"Eh? Sally!"

"Come here—come back here." Bowman returned slowly. Her eyes met his steadily, though her voice fluttered as she demanded: "You meant—what you said—about me, and about thinking—of me—that way?"

"God is my witness I meant every word of it," Bowman answered.

Then she was in his arms and it was a long time before she resumed the topic.

"You old fraud, you funny old fraud!" she giggled finally. "Why I knew, I knew all the time—"

"Huh?" Bowman blinked.

"Of course I knew! Don't you suppose any woman would know? You're as transparent as plate glass and as for fooling anybody, why you—you couldn't get away with sleight of hand in an asylum for the blind. And if you had been what you pretended, what Eddy Denby tried to make of you, I'd never love you in a million years, never! One brainy person is enough for any family. Absolutely! You're honest—and you are *you*, that's all I ask."

"Sally," Bowman demanded eagerly, "how soon will you marry me?"

Sally Ames considered a moment with knit brow. "I had an engagement with my tailor for to-morrow at eleven o'clock," she murmured, "and a matinee for the afternoon, but I needn't really keep them, need I?"

## V.

THEY were not married at eleven. It was past four o'clock next afternoon that a justice pronounced Walter Bowman and Sally Ames one and indivisible and Eddy Denby and Lydia Crawford were the only guests and witnesses. The newlyweds caught a train from Grand Central at five o'clock leaving the faithful Eddy to talk to reporters.

"We have an engagement this evening to plan the book," Eddy reminded his fellow witness. "Suppose we have dinner some place together?"

Lydia Crawford, who had been shedding a surreptitious tear as women will do at weddings, started like a frightened horse. She agreed to dine with Eddy, but from that moment her manner toward him changed. She showed sudden fits of gaiety and unexpected relapses into quiet during which she looked almost frightened. She talked either too much or not at all.

At first Eddy thought she must be pretty badly cut up about seeing her friend married to Walter Bowman. Then he did not know what to think. Finally an explanation came to him and the very thought of it made him pale.

Lydia Crawford had loved Bowman; still loved him!

They were both silent as a taxi rolled them to Lydia Crawford's apartment hotel on Park Avenue.

Eddy Denby lingered uncertainly in the reception-room. Then he said with sudden decision: "You don't want to see me to-night, do you?"

She hesitated, smiled wanly, then gently shook her head. Her eyes were frightened and almost tearful.

"Well," said Eddy, sighing deeply, "I won't stop then—no, I'll be rolling along. It's all right. The wedding I guess—kind of sudden, wasn't it? Sort of upset you?"

Lydia nodded mutely. He was almost sure there were tears in her eyes now.

"We-e-el, good night then—good night. I'd better run along—I suppose. The book can wait a day or so, can't it? Maybe Thursday evening?"

He turned to go since she made no answer. "Wait!" She whispered the word. "No, not Thursday evening, please. Not—not any evening. The book—I—"

"Next week, then—"

"No. I—I'm afraid—never. The book—"

Surprise held Eddy rooted. "Good Lord, you're not going to throw over the book! Not altogether?"

She nodded her head that she was going to throw over the book altogether.

"Oh, but you can't—I mean, you mustn't. It's a big book—a fine, big idea, that book. Oh, no, Lydia—"

"Please, I think you'd better go," Lydia said, turning her back on him. "I—we—we can't go on—"

In the act of letting himself out, Eddy stopped with a grim face. "Look here, there's just one thing I've got to know. Just one thing. I—think I—deserve—to know it. Then I'll go. But, first, tell me, are you very much attached—are you in love with—Walter Bowman?"

"Bowman!"

She whirled about to face him, her eyes wide.

"Yes, Walter Bowman. Did you—do you—"

"Heavenly saints, no! Eddie Denby!"

"Well, then, are you in love with—er—any man?"

"Why, no—not exactly. No—"

Denby threw all his wise forebodings to the winds. He had gone too far now. He no longer cared that this woman was the brilliant Lydia Crawford. He no longer cared about anything except the answer to one question. "Lydia," he stammered, "Lydia, you see how it is with me! Lydia, for God's sake put me out of my agony—I love you—"

"We can't," she exclaimed, "we can't marry. I'm not what you think me—I'm a cheat and a fraud. You think I'm an authority on china—you think I'm an authority on a lot of things; that I'm bright and think a lot about big questions. Well, I don't. I don't care how much you may hate me, I've got to tell you the truth. I'm not any of the things people admire me for. That's all vanity and pretense. I never was bright. I never thought anything deep in my life. I know you'll despise me, but I won't have you love me for a lie! Listen—all the things you think I am, the things you've admired and loved about me aren't me at all. They were thought out for me. I was coached in them. Simply because I liked to seem different—and brilliant. And I—I can't be any of them any more be—because the woman who coached me, the woman who prompted me and won my applause for me g-got married—to-day—"

Denby's face was radiant with his widest grin. "Lydia, you don't mean—not—"

"Yes," Lydia nodded abjectly, "it was Sally Ames. I've paid her a salary for years—just for that."

Hundreds of men and women have been made famous as Walter Bowman was, by the skilled brains of men and women entirely unknown to fame. But since his marriage Walter Bowman has always boasted that his wife does all the clever things which people try to credit to him.

While Eddy Denby, released from anonymity, has won a considerable reputation in his own name, and the brilliant Lydia Crawford is understood to have found domestic life preferable to public applause.

# Circumstances

by Charles King Van Riper

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

**W**HEN Mrs. Emily Spalding, who lived alone with her parrot, cat, and dog, was found dead in her house on Maple Street, it was a question as to whether or not she had been murdered, but substitute County Physician Brent gave it as his opinion that it could have been either murder or an accident. Two suspicious characters had been seen near the house, and the doctor's memory carried him back to the time when he had been called in to attend Elsie Spalding in her last illness, the unmarried daughter, as he had understood, of Mrs. Spalding. The parrot's cry of "Police! Robbers! Help!" which it had certainly never been taught, pointed, however, to a tragedy.

Then, with the arrival of Peggy Archer, actress, whose real name was also Elsie Spalding, it appeared that the dead Elsie had been her sister-in-law—but how, if she were unmarried? Brent could not fathom it. Pendleton, county prosecutor, learning from Miss Archer that her mother had kept hidden a sum of three thousand dollars or over, which had been stolen, was certain that the actress was keeping something back—her sudden faint at a face which she had said she had seen at the window he discredited as a fake. Nor would he listen to the testimony of Mrs. Fanny West, a neighbor, in this regard. But when Shufflin' Joe Madden, a tramp, having acquired twenty dollars from a fellow vagabond, one Genroe, was himself accused of the murder, principally through the efforts of Patrolman Collins, events followed thick and fast: Pendleton's attempt to trap Miss Archer, in whom both he and Brent were interested; newspaper publicity attacking Pendleton and the police department; the discovery of finger-prints pointing almost certainly to murder—and, lastly, the startling disclosure of Mammy Jewel, Brent's negro house-keeper. Miss Archer, following her faint, had been removed to the Brent house.

Mammy had whispered, with reference to the girl: "There was a man in her room last night."

"What do you mean, mammy?"

"Just what I says, Mr. Phil. Last night they wuz a man in Miss Peggy's room that left his cigarettes on the table, and his foot-tracks on the flo'."

## CHAPTER X.

### THE CLOSING NET.

**C**OLLINS, despatched from headquarters, had no difficulty in locating a brown house in Elm Street not far from Crescent Avenue, and found there Rachel Long a widow, and her spinster sister.

Yes, Mrs. Long remembered having fed a tramp the preceding Thursday.

And when Collins explained the reason for his inquiry, the spinster sister fell to wringing her hands and repeating: "It might just as well have been us! It might just as well have been us!"

Under Mrs. Long's urging the sister composed herself, and Collins got them into the police department automobile to drive

to headquarters. Captain Bradley was busy, but not for long.

Just after the policeman had seen that Mrs. Long and her sister had seated themselves in the corridor outside the captain's office, the door opened and Collins heard the captain saying:

"How many times must I tell you that it is of no interest to us who looked into the window *Sunday* night? Our business is to find out who was there *Thursday* night."

Mrs. Fanny West appeared in the doorway. "Then you won't let me try to identify the prisoner?"

Collins wondered how in the world this woman had ever heard of the charge against Madden so quickly. He did not know that she had been across the street

This story began in *The Argosy* for July 17.

when the tramp was being brought back from the undertaking establishment.

"Go ahead. Look at him all you like," sighed the captain. "Tell the turnkey I want him to take you to Madden's cell and let you look at him."

Mrs. West was away like the wind.

Collins stepped up to say that he had brought Mrs. Long and her sister to see if the prisoner was the man they had fed in their kitchen the night of Mrs. Spalding's death.

"Then we might as well go right along down-stairs," said the captain, leading the way toward the staircase.

The lockup was in a separate wing back of the main building. A short corridor led to it. In this passageway they met Mrs. West emerging. She was very white and shaken.

"Did you see him?" asked the captain.

"Yes," gasped the woman, with horror in her eyes.

"Is he the man?"

"I—I—I don't know," she sobbed. "I wish I hadn't come." Mrs. West rushed for the street door.

To look at the lockup it seemed a scrupulously clean pavilion of concrete and steel, but for all that there was a noisome reek in the place. Mrs. Long's sister advanced with handkerchief at her nose. When they reached the cell, Madden was lying on the bare steel spring of his bunk.

"Get up out of that," said the captain.

Madden stirred, but did not attempt to rise.

"Get up!" roared the captain.

Madden started violently, and with his dazed eyes on the captain tried to force himself up. After struggling a minute, he fell back.

"Better help him," said the captain, and Collins and the turnkey entered the cell. Catching hold of the prisoner, they hauled him up from his bunk. Madden could not stand alone, and with the policemen gripping him under the arm-pits his dead weight dangled, the legs limp, arms stuck out stiffly, and the shoulders grotesquely hunched.

"That's the man," whispered Mrs. Long, and turned away.

Her sister had already drawn back, and, catching the widow's arm, stumbled toward the door.

"And to think it might have been us!" she sobbed as they reached the assembly room.

The open air had done wonders for Mrs. West. In fact, she had scarcely crossed the street when she decided to wait and see what the other two women knew about the case. Fortunately for Mrs. West, the offer Collins had made to drive them back to their home had been declined.

The sister had whispered to Mrs. Long that they had had quite enough notoriety without riding any farther in an automobile with a police-department shield. And Mrs. Long had said that she thought the walk home would do her sister a world of good. So the widow and her sister left headquarters on foot.

The waiting Mrs. West contrived that they should encounter her, and promptly introduced herself as an occasional worshiper in the church where the others were pewholders. That made everything all right.

Mrs. West soon was fully informed as to the sisters' connection with the case. And when she left them at the corner of Maple Street the spinster sister had said for the fifth time in shocked excitement: "He might have murdered us in cold blood as we were sitting there—we who were putting the food into his mouth!"

In the short distance down Maple Street to her own home, Mrs. West's spirits sank to gloomy depths. It did seem as if she was doomed to be a bystander at this most thrilling moment of Maple Street history—and living just across the street from where the woman was murdered. But there was a surprise for Mrs. West.

The surprise was in the person of Mr. Sam West, unexpectedly back from his travels. Here was an ear for her troubles, a bosom for her cares. She threw herself into her husband's arms with a glad cry. But Mrs. West had foreseen only half her luck. She had no more than begun to tell about the murder when West jumped up.

"By jing!" he exclaimed, thumping a fist against the palm of the other hand.

"What was it?" asked Mrs. West in alarm.

"Fanny," he said tensely, "I saw the man going into Mrs. Spalding's house."

"You did!"

"When I was on my way to the station. Remember, I took the night train Thursday." West subsided in his chair and sat there biting his lips.

"What did he look like?" asked Mrs. West breathlessly.

"He was a tramp."

Mrs. West darted from the room. The next thing he knew, his wife was back and holding out his hat.

"What's the idea?" asked West.

"You must go straight down to police headquarters."

West blinked.

"They've got a tramp locked up," his wife went on. "If you can identify him—"

"Wait a minute," objected West, pushing away the hand with the hat.

"But it's a murder case!"

"Sure it is," agreed West. "That's why I want to go slow."

"You mean you're not certain you saw the man going into Mrs. Spalding's?"

"Of course I'm certain," retorted West, "but I can't afford to get mixed up in anything like this."

Mrs. West stared at him.

"It'll mean going to court," continued West, "and losing a lot of time."

"Why, Sam West, what are you thinking of?"

"Well, see here, Fanny," her husband replied, "business is business."

"And murder is murder."

"That sounds good," laughed West mirthlessly, "but if I don't look out for myself no one else will do it. Who'll take care of my trade? Anyway, it can't bring the old lady back to life."

"But murder!" gasped Mrs. West. "It might just as well have been me!"

"Don't talk foolishness."

"It's not foolishness."

"If it could help the old lady—" West was musing, when he suddenly found his hat on his head.

One of his wife's hands was on his shoul-

der and the other was pointing to the door."

"See here, Sam West," she was saying, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself. You go right down-town this minute and tell them what you know."

"But, Fanny—"

"Because if you don't," declared Mrs. West, "I will—"

When Sam West left the house his wife went right up-stairs and to the closet in her bedroom. Could she trim over her best hat so it would do, or would she need a new one for the trial?

And Sam West identified Madden as the man he had seen going up the path to the back of Mrs. Spalding's cottage.

## CHAPTER XI.

### IMPASSE.

IT was some time before Brent reached a decision. But with his mind made up, he went at once to Peggy Archer. She was on the *chaise-longue* in the big front room up-stairs. The Chinese blue carpet had been scrupulously swept, and the ivory and blue table was without a trace of defunct cigarettes.

Brent suspected that the girl had been crying. He went over to the windows, scowled down at the street, then faced her as she studied the toe of a brocaded slipper.

"Miss Archer," he asked abruptly, who was the man who came to see you last night?"

After a scarcely perceptible pause, the girl looked up in surprise.

"I know there was a man here," said Brent.

"How curious," she said, "that you should know it, while I—"

"Don't deny it," he said crisply; "there were the footprints."

The girl's eyes flashed. "And if there was a man here—" she challenged.

"What are you?" demanded Brent.

"Wouldn't it have been well for you to have found out before you brought me here as your guest?"

Brent was brought up abruptly.

"Or did you bring me here," she continued, "to spy on me?"

Brent tried to speak, but the girl went on:

"You were so ready to blame Mr. Pendleton: are you quite sure that you aren't playing exactly the same game?"

"You can't put me off!" declared Brent. "I want to know who was here."

"Couldn't you ask mammy?" she suggested. "I rather imagine that she was the one who told you."

"Peggy!" he burst out, stepping toward her. "Can't you see I want to help you—that I love you?"

"Please!" was the girl's alarmed protest as she slipped from the *chaise longue* so that it was between them.

Brent bowed his head and stepped back.

"You must never say that again, Phil!"

He looked up to see that she was frightened and nervous. Then, as if to put him on his honor, she sat on the farther edge of the *chaise*.

"I suppose," she said, speaking swiftly, "that when mammy told you, you decided to come to me and demand an explanation, not only of that, but of the other things that have baffled you."

That was precisely what Brent had intended.

"You can ask any questions you care to," offered the girl, but qualified it with the warning: "I won't promise to answer them. To begin with, there *was* a man here last night."

"Who was it?" asked Brent.

"I don't know."

Brent looked at her sharply, then said: "You mean you won't tell."

"Yes, that's what I mean."

Brent's gesture was his comment on the uselessness of further questions.

"And I cannot tell you what he wanted," continued the girl.

"Oh, don't go on!" Brent broke in; then asked bitterly: "But why did you bring him here, when you know what talk there is through the town? Their tongues are wagging now with your name and Pendleton's and mine—now another."

"I didn't know he was coming," said the girl steadily.

Brent gasped. "Didn't know!"

Peggy was close to tears. "Oh, Phil," she whispered, "I can't explain—it's all too horrible! I never knew what it was to be happy, Phil, until three months ago. And then I was so happy, I thought I was going on being happy for a long, long time—and then, this!"

"I don't understand," said Brent.

There was just the slightest lifting of her hand. Brent obeyed it by going over and sitting at the foot of the *chaise longue*.

"I was seventeen when I left home," said the girl, "to go on the stage, although I didn't tell my mother that, for she was bitter about the theater. Mother found out though—in some way or other—and I expected that she would come and take me home."

"Weeks passed, and nothing happened; then I realized that she did not want me to come home. I was sorry; chiefly because I knew how sorry she would feel when after a few months I rode up to the cottage in a wonderful motor and wearing beautiful clothes—a famous actress. I was seventeen, you see."

"I might have had the motor and the clothes, but I wanted success most of all. Once, when I was in stock in the Middle West, there seemed to be a short cut even to that, but the man who made the offer was shot by the woman he was living with. Fortunately that happened within the first two years, and, although there were more men and more promises, I never could forget the panic the first affair put me in."

"When I saw how long the way would be I began to write to my mother. I sent her letters regularly, but she never answered. Do you know what I used to think of? It was that parrot and the way it used to call: 'Elsie! Elsie! Where are you, Elsie?' I wondered how it made my mother feel to hear the thing saying that over and over again, calling me."

"Three years ago I was able to have very good clothes, even if they weren't the marvelous gowns I had planned at seventeen. And in another year I had the car—not the stunning motor I had counted on, but a plain, every-day automobile. Then

two months ago came success—and I was ready to go home. It was the Sunday after that first wonderful week.

"Thanks to the woman in the Middle West who shot her lover, my mother's happiness was complete. She never could forgive my going on the stage, but she was lonely, and she loved me. I came every week, as Elsie Spalding, not Peggy Archer."

"Why did you change your name?" asked Brent.

"Because—" The girl checked herself. "Mother was so bitterly opposed to the stage," she explained. "I don't suppose that until they saw it in the paper the neighbors ever suspected I was Peggy Archer."

The girl was silent. Brent frowned at the floor. The pause became awkward.

"Did I tell you," asked Brent, "that that they are holding a man for the murder of your mother?"

The girl swayed slightly, then stiffened.

"A tramp," said Brent, scowling at the carpet—"a man named Madden, who has been in the city jail since the night your mother died—"

A sudden movement made him look around. The girl had thrown herself down on the *chaise-longue*, quivering with an emotion that was the more terrible because it was mute.

Brent took hold of her shoulders. As he lifted the girl her head jerked back as if from the violent tremors that were shaking her body. Then from the straining throat came a sob of utter agony, and the storm of hysteria broke. It brought Nancy to the room, and Brent, the man of medicine, withdrew. For this was a crisis in which a woman was the better physician.

## CHAPTER XII.

### PENDLETON'S RUSE.

IT was nearly an hour later that Nancy Brent found Phil in his study and told him that Peggy wanted to see him. "She wants to talk to you, Phil," said his sister, "but perhaps it would be better if she didn't. She's fearfully upset."

"Lock the door," said the girl tensely, as he entered the room.

He obeyed.

Peggy was propped up on the *chaise-longue*, the fresh white pillows from the bed having been added to those already there.

Brent sat at her feet.

"Do you remember what you said to me, Phil?" was her breathless question.

"About the murder charge?"

"No," said Peggy quickly. "Something I asked you not to say again."

"That I—" Brent was too astonished to finish.

"Yes, that's it!" she said. "Do you love me, Phil?"

"Love you?" he cried. "Why, I—" He tried to take her in his arms, but she held him off.

"No. You mustn't," she gasped. "It's all too hopeless. But you *do* love me!"

"More than anything in all the world," he whispered.

"Would you do whatever I wanted you to?" she pleaded. "Blindly? Without asking questions?"

Brent drew back. "Peggy," he asked, "are you being quite fair with me?"

"I don't know whether I'm being fair or not," she said desperately; "but I do know that I love you, Phil, and that I need you, oh, so very much!"

"And yet you don't know whether you are playing fair?" Brent demanded incredulously.

"We—none of us can know very much, can we?" Peggy asked. "What we think we're doing for the best may turn out to be the very thing we shouldn't have done. Life isn't lived by a book or a rule of logic: it all depends on circumstances."

Neither of them spoke for the next few moments.

"Can't you tell me everything?" begged Brent.

The girl shook her head.

There was a moment of torture for Brent, then he asked: "What do you want me to do?"

"That is your promise?"

He nodded.

"I don't even know that this is true,"

said Peggy, "but I believe it is the truth: the man they are accusing did not kill my mother."

Brent was on his feet. "Why do you say that?"

"Because I have reasons for believing it was some one else."

"Who?" challenged Brent; and when she did not reply, demanded: "Don't you realize that it may mean death for the man they've arrested? He said nearly enough this morning to convict himself."

"You must prevent it."

"I?"

"Yes."

"But how can I?"

"Surely if I tell you that the man is innocent you can prove it."

"Can't you see—"

"I don't expect you to prove it yourself, Phil," she said quickly. "What I want you to do is to get the best lawyers. I will pay. You must tell them that this man is not guilty; that—"

"What do you suppose the lawyers would do the minute I explained I was engaging them because you believed the man was innocent? Why, they'd be after you."

"You're not to tell them."

"Then, how could I—"

"It is for me, Phil!" pleaded the girl.

"Then, tell me all that you know."

"I can't tell you anything more," she protested. "But this man must not be convicted for something he didn't do."

"He will be," answered Brent, "and you will be called as a witness against him—to establish the existence of a motive."

"Phil!" sobbed the girl. "Will they really do that?"

He nodded.

"But I couldn't!" she gasped.

"They'll make you," he replied. "You say you believe the man did not do it, but just the same you'll have to take the stand and testify that you know the money was hidden behind that brick, and that you discovered it was missing. You can imagine what that will mean to the man on trial."

"I can't do it! I can't do it!"

"Then, tell me the truth about all this!"

"I would have to—to go—into court," she said brokenly, "and—and testify against—" The girl covered her face with her hands.

"Can you do that?" he asked steadily.

"Is there—no way?"

"You can only avoid it by leaving the State before they have a chance to summon you."

"Then, I must do that!" she declared, with a determination that broke and left her pleading: "Oh, Phil, you must help me—"

There was a rap at the door.

"Yes," said Phil, going over to open it.

"It's that Mr. Pendleton," said mammy. "He wants to see Miss Peggy."

"Do you suppose he's here to make me testify?" the girl asked fearfully.

"Perhaps," said Brent; "but I doubt it. We'll see."

He started down-stairs.

"There, I know what you're going to say!" exclaimed Pendleton, as Brent was about to speak. "But I must see Miss Spalding."

The prosecutor was fumbling in his pocket. "Something has happened to change the whole aspect of the case. I want her to try to identify this writing." He drew out an envelope.

In a flash it occurred to Brent that with Peggy Archer so deeply involved with developments going as they had been, any change must be for the better. He led Pendleton to the front room up-stairs.

"Sorry to trouble you, Miss Spalding," apologized the prosecutor as he entered, "but perhaps this will be good news for you. I want you to see what's in this envelope." He held it out.

"What's in it?" she asked faintly as she held out her hand.

The instant she took the envelope Pendleton stepped back. "If you open it," he said, "you'll find a subpoena to appear before the grand jury."

Brent swung around on the prosecutor, to find him smiling.

"I imagined, doctor," he laughed coldly, "that by this time Miss Spalding had

persuaded you to help her keep her secret."

"What does it mean?" asked the girl, staring at the paper she had drawn from the envelope.

"It means," said Prosecutor Pendleton in a tone of satisfaction, "that the law will make you tell what you know about your mother's death."

Brent snatched the subpoena out of the girl's hands. After a quick glance at it he again faced the prosecutor. "I notice," he said steadily, "that you have subpoenaed 'Miss Elsie Spalding.'" Pendleton was about to make an offhand reply, but Brent added: "Miss Elsie Spalding is dead."

The prosecutor looked from Brent to the girl still holding the envelope, then back again to the doctor.

"I made out the burial certificate," Brent assured him. "It's on file at the city hall if you care to look at it."

Then pressing the paper in the prosecutor's hand, Brent observed: "I think the dead are beyond the law."

Pendleton laughed.

"True enough," he agreed, then, turning to the girl, suggested: "If you'll look in the envelope you'll find a subpoena for Miss Peggy Archer."

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### THE CASE FOR THE STATE.

**J**USTICE is more swift than sure when its agents are driven to justify themselves. "Shufflin' Joe" Madden was speedily brought to trial. Prosecutor Thornton had prepared a strong case for the State. Before the grand jury, and in shaping his case for the trial, he did not attempt to question Peggy Archer beyond the circumstance of the space behind the loose brick having been a hiding-place for money.

Publicly it was explained that Miss Archer's reticence in the first place had been due to the desire of a daughter to keep the memory of her mother without the shocking anticlimax of a murder trial. Either Pendleton believed this to be so,

or he was less interested in establishing the facts in Mrs. Emily Spalding's death than in proving Madden had caused it.

The days that followed Peggy Archer's fragmentary but startling admission were terrible ones for Brent. So far, he had solved only one of the mysteries that surrounded the woman he loved. He believed now that Mrs. Spalding had deliberately identified the daughter-in-law as the daughter to establish the complete disowning of the girl who had gone on the stage. No doubt the brief mention of it in the paper, describing the deceased as a daughter, had been regarded by the neighbors as just another of the mistakes the newspapers were always making.

What Brent forgot was his own nervous haste because of the uncanny way the parrot called the dead girl's name, and, possibly, the tendency toward error or misstatement in a person passing through the experience Mrs. Spalding was undergoing at the time she supplied the information for the death certificate.

But for the single circumstance explained, there were others more bewilderingly complicated. And there was the promise that he, Philip Brent, had made to be silent when even the little that he knew might easily have meant the difference between life and death to Madden.

Brent had been in love with Peggy Archer when she had been to him but a presence in another world, the make-believe land of the play. Probably, in ordinary circumstances, he would never have offered to lift that veil of illusion. Perhaps, had the opportunity come, he would not have dared risk discovery that this woman of his dreams was after all only a real woman with very real vanities and weaknesses.

Then, by magic, she had been translated into his own life, wonderful beyond even his dreams. And Brent knew that he loved her and would go on loving her in spite of everything. Brent recalled that line from Lovelace:

I could not love thee, dear, so much loved I not  
honor more.

He had always liked it. But now—  
What was honor without her love? Honor

was a thing of the code; love was instinctive, life itself. Honor was arbitrary; love was absolute. Love was fundamental; honor was superficial. Was this reasoning defiance or defense? Brent hardly knew whether he held these things because he believed them to be true, or because, if they were not true, he had hopelessly compromised himself.

Brent had persuaded Peggy of the folly of engaging counsel for Madden. As it turned out, the prisoner provided himself with a lawyer. Madden had a mother somewhere in Ohio, and it was from the mother's money that a retainer was paid Washington Balbridge, a perennial candidate for the State Senate, a connoisseur of brown derby hats, and a criminal lawyer whose chief distinction was a native shrewdness and ready wit. As counsel for the defense, Balbridge had been instrumental in not a few acquittals and some electrocutions.

Indeed, the picturesque Mr. Balbridge even overshadowed Madden as an object of interest in the court-room. Madden had exchanged his rags for an ill-shaped suit of coarse, dark gray cloth. There was no necktie to conceal the white button at the throat of his gray flannel shirt, and although he was scrubbed and shaved, his hair was still somewhat tousled. He sat beside Balbridge, a dull, dazed look in his eyes.

A word concerning Pendleton's attitude toward Madden is not amiss. In the first place, he had more than half convinced himself that Madden was guilty. In the second place, some one had to be guilty: the public demanded a victim. Madden had put his head in the noose. It was Pendleton's duty as prosecutor to spring the drop.

Pendleton's opening to the jury was, in brief, as follows:

"The State will prove that there came to this city, on the day and date aforesaid, one Joseph L. Madden, of that breed of criminal parasite known as a yeggman. By witnesses, as well as the man's own admissions, it will be shown that he was in the neighborhood in which the crime was committed.

"We will follow him by successive steps from the home of two women who 'fed him when he was hungry,' past the dwelling of a citizen at the corner of Crescent Avenue and Maple Street, who, watchful of the public welfare, gave a warning that unfortunately came too late. We will follow him along the pathway through a fragrant garden grown by the gentle little old lady who was his victim—a pathway that ends at the door of the kitchen in which her body was found.

"The State will prove that this lonely woman came to her death by a blow from a blunt instrument; that this blow was delivered when the victim interrupted the yeggman in the act of removing money and valuables from a hiding-place.

"We will show further that the murderer, with the craft of his kind, endeavored to conceal the manner in which the victim met her death by staining the corner of the kitchen table with blood and causing three gray hairs to adhere to it. This we will show by evidence of the fingerprints of a man found on the table to which not even delivery boys were known to have come.

"Further, we will produce a parrot, a bird, but for which the cunning of the murderer might have been of avail. Witnesses will be called to show that never before that Thursday night was the parrot known to utter such cries as the bird itself will produce before the jury: The accusation: 'Police! Robbers! Help!'

"The prosecution will show by the statements of the accused that his only explanation of how he spent the evening of the murder includes a reference to having 'walked in his sleep': This from a man who would have been prevented from forming any such habit by the bars behind which he has spent most of his nights.

"The State will prove that at the time of his arrest he had in his possession the sum of twenty dollars which he claimed he had found.

"It will be shown that from first to last this dreg from the sediment of society has lied.

"And, moreover, that when he was ac-

cused of the crime, he characteristically tried to fasten it on a companion he had previously exonerated."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### POINT AND COUNTER-POINT.

PENDLETON appreciated the difficulty he would have in turning Philip Brent's testimony to account. Old Dr. Jackson could have been handled, but the acting county physician had held from the first to the theory of death from accident or natural causes, and probably would continue to do so.

The prosecutor acted accordingly. At that early stage when the county physician would normally have been placed on the stand, Pendleton called "Captain Peter Bradley."

"What has been your connection with this case?" was his first question.

"Captain of detectives in charge of the police investigation."

After carrying his witness along for a time, Pendleton directed the captain: "Describe for the court the wound that would be made by a blow from a blunt instrument."

"I object!" protested Baldridge.

The objection was overruled, whereat Baldridge took an exception. But Bradley described in some detail the nature of the wound concerning which Pendleton had inquired.

In conclusion the captain said: "It is such a wound as might be received in falling against a table."

The witness was turned over for cross-examination.

"Captain," said Baldridge, shifting his gaze from Pendleton to the witness, "have you had any conversation with any one concerning the testimony you have just given?"

"No," said the captain complacently.

"That's all," said Baldridge, with a humorous glance at the jury.

Then Brent took the stand. He testified that when he had been called Mrs. Spalding had been dead more than forty-eight hours.

"What, in your opinion, was the cause of death?" asked Pendleton.

"Either heart disease," replied Brent, "or a fracture of the skull sustained in falling against the corner of a table."

"Could the wound have been caused by a blow from a blunt instrument? Yes, or no?"

"Yes," admitted Brent slowly.

The witness was surrendered to counsel for the defense.

"Is it your opinion, doctor," asked Baldridge, "that death was due to a blow from a blunt instrument"—he eyed the captain of detectives—"other than a table?"

"No. It is not."

That ended Brent's testimony.

Peggy Archer had only to testify to her knowledge that money was habitually hidden behind a loose brick, and that on the Sunday her mother's death was discovered she had found that it was missing. The girl was intensely nervous, and all but broke down when dismissed. There was no cross-examination, and Peggy departed at once, accompanied by Nan.

Having established the fact of Mrs. Spalding's death and a possible motive for it Pendleton proceeded against Madden.

Mrs. Rachel Long and her spinster sister in turn identified Madden, and testified that he was the man to whom they had given a meal.

Simeon Sturgis was the next witness. Asked to describe just what he had seen the night in question, Mr. Sturgis repeated his testimony, concluding: "Just after I got back to the window one man turned the corner into Maple Street. I saw him pass under the light. Then I telephoned. When I returned to the window I saw the other moving off along Crescent Avenue."

"That isn't—" began Mrs. West from her seat among the spectators. The court rapped sharply for order, and an attendant came up to caution Mrs. West about her behavior.

"Look around, Mr. Sturgis, and see if you can see any one in the court-room who might be either of those men," Pendleton instructed him.

The witness pointed to Madden.

"Is this," asked the prosecutor, "the man who turned away in the darkness or the one who passed under the light?"

"I think it is the man who turned down Maple Street."

"That would be the one who passed under the light?"

"Yes."

"Any questions?" Pendleton asked Baldridge.

"You say," began Baldridge, "that you 'think' this was the man who turned into Crescent Avenue."

"Maple Street," was the witness's correction. He had always regarded Washington Baldridge as a scallywag and this attempt to trip him up convinced Sturgis that he was right.

"Aren't you sure of it?" prodded Baldridge. "Remember, you are under oath."

Baldridge had made a misstep. Sturgis's answer to the question of his integrity was an abrupt "Yes!" Pendleton smiled.

Samuel West was next called to the stand. It was Fanny West's hour, reflected glory, because it was her husband who would speak, but dazzling none the less, for it would fall with full effulgence on her and her made-over hat.

"Where were you at 7.45 o'clock on the night—" Pendleton began.

West did not wait for him to finish. "I was walking north in Maple Street."

"On which side of—"

"The down-town side," West broke in again.

"The side Mrs. Spalding's cottage is on?"

"Yes."

"Tell the court what happened."

"Well," said West, turning to the judge in something of a confidential way, "as I came along I saw someone go in at the gate of Mrs. Spalding's garden—"

"Would you recognize him again?" asked the prosecutor.

"He's sitting right over there," said West, pointing at Madden.

"You saw him only at the gate?"

"No!" announced West. "After I had gone on a few steps I looked back."

"When you looked around what did you see?"

"Saw the man," said West. "The kitchen window shade was up a little way, and he was kind of outlined against the light."

"Are you sure this is the man?"

"Yes," said West with an emphatic nod.

"Mr. Baldridge—" was Pendleton's invitation.

"If you thought it strange that a man should be there," observed counsel for the defense, "why didn't you investigate?"

"I was on my way to catch a train."

"You were in a hurry?"

"Yes."

"But in walking briskly past the man at the gate his features were fixed so indelibly that you are positive he is sitting here in court!"

"I wasn't in any such a hurry as you make out," retorted West.

"But you were on your way to catch a train."

"With a half-hour to do it in. I started at quarter to eight to get the eight-fifteen."

"Then, if you thought it was strange, why didn't you investigate?"

"Because I don't make my living by meddling in other people's business," said West, looking straight at Baldridge.

As an undercurrent of laughter crossed the court-room, West added: "We can't all be lawyers."

That brought a stern reprimand from the court, but just the same the jury had enjoyed the joke.

Only Madden, trying to ease the collar of his gray flannel shirt, seemed to have missed the point.

## CHAPTER XV.

"POLICE! ROBBERS! HELP!"

THE climax of the trial came when Pendleton tried to put Mrs. Spalding's parrot on the stand as a state's witness. After all, it was on the words of the feather mimic that the case hung.

The court-room was hushed as an attendant brought in the big wire cage screened with newspapers. Baldridge viewed the arrival with a smile of confidence.

As the newspapers were stripped away

the parrot set up a shrill demand of: "What's the matter? What's the matter?" Thé bird's outbreak caused a laugh that the judge silenced with a brisk rapping of his gavel.

At that the parrot asked with increased querulousness: "What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"Your honor, please," said Baldridge, blandly, "is it the purpose of Mr. Prosecutor to place this parrot on the stand?"

"Precisely," Pendleton assured him.

Baldridge threw up his hands in mock despair.

"Does counsel for the defense object?" inquired the prosecutor.

"Not at all! Not at all!" chuckled Washington Baldridge, thrusting his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. Then a swift change came over the genial gentleman, and his tone held a taunt and a dare. "But remember," he warned Pendleton, "I will invoke the court to prevent any endeavor to evade the rules of procedure."

Pendleton gestured the attendant to take the parrot to the stand, at which the bird was stirred to coax: "Here kitty! Come kitty! Pretty kitty!"

"Let the witness be sworn," challenged Baldridge, his eyes sparkling.

Pendleton addressed the court. "May it please your honor this effort of the defense to avail itself of technicalities is not unexpected. I submit that this is no ordinary case, that we are here confronted by a situation that has never before arisen in a court of law—"

"But—" began Baldridge. It was an ill-timed interruption. The judge flashed his displeasure on counsel for the defense.

"If I am correctly informed," resumed Pendleton serenely, "and, after an exhaustive search, I feel confident that I am: there is no precedent to guide us in accepting this parrot as a witness. I know of no case in which the testimony of one of these remarkable mimics has been relevant. But we are here confronted by just such a situation, and as an advocate of this community I feel that the jury is entitled to hear for itself the strangely significant accusation."

"Are you prepared to swear the witness?" asked the judge. The same question seemed to have assailed the court attendant who, Bible in hand, stood beside the parrot. He scratched his head in perplexity.

A peremptory blow of the gavel silenced the titter that stirred in the court-room. Madden was studying the backs of his hands.

"Elsie, where are you, Elsie?" demanded the parrot. Brent, seated inconspicuously, shuddered. The judge gave the bird a glance of annoyance.

"Admitting that it is impossible to place the witness under oath—" continued Pendleton.

"Ought to be able to make a parrot swear," offered Baldridge in an aside calculated for the jurymen's enjoyment.

"I cannot too strongly urge upon the court," went on the prosecutor, "the advisability of letting his voice be heard. Where a proceeding is unprecedented it cannot be irregular."

"If the law, say three hundred years ago, had ceased to grow, if it had become rigid instead of fluid, we would still be burning witches, using the stocks and ducking stool, selling our orphans into bondage, and trafficking in human life."

"We have now arrived at a point that is beyond the pale of our present laws, therefore, we must add a new decision to the great body of the law. We cannot ignore the issue, cannot escape it: we must face the facts, and I say that to safeguard the public interest, to see that no injustice is done, we must freely and fully hear every voice that is lifted to accuse, as to defend. And I submit, your honor, that it does not make one iota of difference whether the words are those of a human, or this feathered creature, so be it that they have a bearing on the case."

"Are you prepared to swear the witness?" asked the judge imperturbably.

Pendleton shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps," suggested the court, his fingers tapping the desk top, "the prosecutor will outline the course he proposes. If the court understands the nature of the testimony to be adduced it does not appear pos-

sible to bring it out by any questioning of the witness—should the court see fit to waive the established preliminary.”

“It is simply a case of placing the parrot on the stand,” was Pendleton’s reply. “Then we will wait until it utters the cries that are significant.”

“Such a proceeding is preposterous!” blustered Baldridge.

The judge lifted a hand that silenced Baldridge, then addressed Pendleton.

“The law is unmistakably clear,” he ruled. “Testimony *must* be given under oath.”

“I understand—” protested Pendleton, but court and counsel for the defense simultaneously cut him short.

“If the prosecutor can find a way to put this gaudily-feathered species of poultry on its honor—” offered Baldridge magnanimously, then sighed: “But parrots are such notorious prevaricators!”

Pendleton made his final appeal. “You will allow a dictograph record,” he argued, “and we have here what is in its essence just that. In the interests of justice I offer this living tongue to giving voice to the words of the dead—”

Pendleton turned in sudden fury on Baldridge: “And I warn you, sir,” he cried, “that the words will be heard! This bird is an instrument of Fate, its speech the echo of an accusation from beyond the grave, an accusation that this cringing wretch”—he shook a finger at the dazed-looking Madden—“this brute with blood upon his hands cannot escape!”

Pendleton swung around to the jury with outflung arms: “It is Fate, gentlemen, Fate! Quibbling and chicanery might thwart the words of life, but nothing, absolutely nothing can stifle the voice of the dead!”

For an instant there was utter silence. The tension increased as Madden caught his breath in a kind of half-sob. Then the parrot burst into a complaining storm of: “What’s the matter! What’s the matter!”

There was a hysterical reaction through the court-room. But there was no need for the judge to bring down the gavel that he held suspended above his desk. Pendleton’s sudden outburst had taken the

court by surprise; he, too, had been held spellbound. And now that it was over Pendleton faced him in deep humility.

The judge cleared his throat. “The parrot will be removed from the court-room,” he directed an attendant, who took immediate steps to comply.

Madden seemed to be tremendously relieved. The prosecutor’s words had invested the parrot with a supernatural quality. The terror gripped him again when, as it was being carried past him, the bird blinked.

Then came one of those swift changes of front in the battle in which the miserable Madden was the stake.

Unable to call the parrot as a witness, Pendleton had chosen the simple alternative of submitting it in evidence as Exhibit E, along with the stained table-cloth, the loose brick, and other collected specimens.

Then, one by one, the Maple Street neighbors were called to testify to the fact that never before the little old lady’s death had the bird cried “Police! Robbers! Help!”

Meanwhile the parrot kept up a string of talk, rehearsing every exclamation in its repertory except one—the fateful three words that the witnesses swore it had latterly used.

Baldridge, to be sure, took every advantage of the parrot’s stubborn omission of the words that were to be turned against his client. He charged the witnesses to tax their memories well, and chided Pendleton in a way that just escaped violation of the decorous conduct of the court. It was very effective, and was rapidly discounting Pendleton’s labor to profit his point.

By this time the parrot’s petulant outcries were incessant. It was a most infernally noisy parrot.

Baldridge gravely suggested that the judge find the parrot in contempt of court—at which Jurymen Number Nine chuckled audibly, and the whole twelve of them grinned.

Pendleton was fighting desperately for time. He himself had heard the bird utter the cry that had changed the death of Mrs. Spalding from a pathetic, but not unusual tragedy of a lonely little old lady, to a

murder case that was unique. It he could prolong the proceedings sufficiently the parrot would speak.

But with an unholy screech of "*Elsie!*" from the parrot, the judge's nerves and patience reached their limit.

"Mr. Prosecutor," he said irascibly, "I see no need of you going over and over again this particular point. I appreciate the weight that the words actually spoken by the parrot would have with the jury, but I can no longer countenance this disturbance." To an attendant, he said: "Remove the evidence."

Gladly did the attendant descend upon the cage. There was a pause in the parrot's tirade as it was swung from the table, then, as it was being borne down the aisle the bird broke into shrill cries of:

"Police! Robbers! Help!"

Madden, his hands gripping the chair, half lifted himself, then collapsed, sobbing.

Prosecutor Pendleton faced the jury, and smiled pleasantly.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### SHUFFLED EVIDENCE.

SOMEHOW the testimony of Sam West wasn't as satisfying to Mrs. Fanny West as she had hoped it would be. The reflected glory left much to be desired in the way of brilliance. Two things increased her sense of disappointment:

The first was that she wore her made-over hat with much aplomb; it really looked awfully well. The second was that of all Mrs. Spalding's neighbors she alone had not been called on to testify. When she saw that the prosecutor was deliberately delaying in hopes that the parrot would speak, she began to grow dizzy with expectancy—which only made her disappointment the more bitter.

Much of what followed, Mrs. West missed. She sat wrapped in thoughts about the injustice of man to man (especially when the party of the second part was a woman) and furthermore about the futility of life in general. Vaguely of course, Mrs. West followed the case for the defense.

After the array of witnesses Pendleton

had produced, "Shufflin' Joe" Madden was a hopeless figure when he took the stand in his own defense. Apparently there was not another one in the whole world who could say a good word for him.

But Philip Brent was aware that the woman he loved had confessed to him that she knew Madden was innocent—and yet she refused to speak. Brent realized that if he were to report even the little he knew that Peggy Archer could be made to tell. But he was keeping quiet.

Brent was in a tremendous confusion of doubts and fears. He clung desperately to a hope that Madden could clear himself, but that hope was fading fast as the tramp blundered through the story of the missing Genroe, the gift of the twenty dollar bill, and that thin explanation of walking in his sleep. The alibi was pitifully weak, utterly unsupported, and Pendleton was Machiavellian in cross-examination.

Why, raged Brent, why was he sitting by silently and seeing this grievous wrong done? Time and again he was minded to speak, but always he recalled the horror of Peggy Archer at her knowledge of the thing. But horror, or no horror, she should speak. And Brent should speak, too, he did not deceive himself. He held this forlorn man in the hollow of his hand; a word would save him, would mean the difference between life and death.

Brent's thoughts were in a fever far beyond logical analysis. Impulse swayed him from one extreme to the other, swept him to the brink of confession, swung him back, to cling desperately to that frail hope that Madden might go free. And always there burned like fire the thought that Peggy Archer was the woman he loved; that this was her secret.

Now Pendleton was tearing into the tramp's story. He was tricking and trapping the man at every turn. Already Madden was floundering in a mire of contradictions. The cracking lash of the prosecutor's questions was flogging him into numbness, so that actually the tramp hardly knew what he was saying.

Madden had been told often enough that they "would put the fear of God in his heart." And shuddering, gulping, bab-

bling on the stand, he certainly was afraid of something—whether it was God, or walls of gray stones and steel, or an ugly chair with a rigging of wires around it.

"That will do," said Pendleton triumphantly when he had forced Madden to whisper hoarsely for the seventh time that absurdity about: "walking in my sleep."

Brent watched the tramp rise unsteadily from the witness chair, then looked away. Outside, the sky was the color of discolored water.

Perhaps every other pair of eyes in that court-room followed Joe Madden as he shuffled to his seat at the table. And among them the eyes of Mrs. Fanny West kindled with inspiration. Mrs. West was instantly on her feet.

"Judge!" she cried.

The court scowled in her direction.

"There's something to be said in this case—" The gavel pounded in authority.

"That Sunday morning—" Mrs. West adopted the simple expedient of raising her voice over the thumping of the gavel. A court attendant plucked at her sleeve, but she shook him off.

"Madam—" began the judge.

"I'm going to speak!" asserted Mrs. West, whose husband was by this time at her other arm.

"Not unless called on to testify," boomed the court, "Officer, remove her from the court-room."

"It's a crime!" cried Mrs. West. "Mr. Sturgis said—"

She was being hurried toward the door, Sam West assisting. Mrs. West saw her glittering chance slipping by, and before it was too late screamed: "Mr. Baldridge, Mr. Baldridge—"

The door closed behind her.

Washington Baldridge, annihilated by Pendleton's masterful handling of Madden, was eager to seize on any crumb of comfort. He rushed through the gate to the enclosure before the bar and hurried down the aisle after the ejected Mrs. West.

The judge pompously took the opportunity to comment on the deplorable sentimentality exhibited by women in murder cases. He served due notice that there would be no tolerance of maudlin outbursts,

and that he proposed to uphold the dignity of the court.

By this time Baldridge was back and whispering with Madden. The brief consultation ended with Baldridge waving Madden back to the stand.

"Is it true," he asked, "that your nickname is 'Shufflin' Joe'?"

"Yes," gulped Madden.

"Yes what?" pursued Baldridge. "Try to speak clearly."

"They call me 'Shufflin' Joe.'"

"Why?"

"Because I kind of walk that way."

"Show the court."

Madden looked bewildered.

"I want the judge to see how you walk."

Madden's hopeless look was obviously a dumb protest that he could not demonstrate his gait sitting down, and Baldridge quickly perceiving it, explained: "That's all right, you can leave the stand."

Madden rose and stood in awkward indecision. The man had been hounded and harassed until he had lost the initiative for even so simple a thing as walking. He was waiting to be guided as to direction.

"Just walk back to your seat," suggested Baldridge.

Pendleton's superior smile broadened.

While Madden made his flat-footed way to the table, Mrs. West came unobserved to a seat at Baldridge's elbow. Madden reached the table to find his chair occupied, and stood stupidly until Baldridge arose.

"That will be all," were Baldridge's words of dismissal, then, gesturing Madden to the vacant seat, he picked out Simeon Sturgis.

"The defense calls Mr. Sturgis," he announced.

Sturgis was greatly surprised, and far from pleased. He felt that he had already done his duty, he had not the faintest inkling of the rascally Baldridge's purpose, and he was distinctly distrustful of the unknown. Of one thing, however, he was sure. It was evident that he could thank the meddlesome Mrs. West for this inconvenience.

"Mr. Sturgis," began Baldridge, "I want you to repeat exactly what you saw the night you looked from your window."

"I object," protested Pendleton. "That has already been gone into thoroughly." The prosecutor was puzzled by Baldridge's move. He scored when the court declined to allow the line of questioning Baldridge had begun.

"Very well," Baldridge resumed, "then tell us where you were immediately after hearing of Mrs. Spalding's death."

"I object," said Pendleton serenely. "Irrelevant."

"I assure the court that this question is one of the utmost importance," urged Baldridge.

The judge was considering.

"Do I have to answer?" queried Sturgis.

"Yes," said the judge.

"Just tell the court where you were," prompted Baldridge.

"Talking with a group of neighbors near Mrs. Spalding's cottage," replied Sturgis tartly. He was still in the dark as to Baldridge's purpose, and plainly considered that the lawyer was plaguing him "unnecessarily."

Baldridge and Mrs. West whispered for a moment; then the counsel asked: "On that occasion you told of seeing the two men?"

"I did."

"Your exact words were," and Baldridge read from a slip of paper, stressing, when he reached them, the final words: "'When I got back to the window the other fellow was shuffling off down Crescent Avenue.'"

There was a pause, then Baldridge asked: "Is that correct?"

"Did you use the word 'shuffled'?" demanded counsel for the defense.

Sturgis turned to the judge to complain bitterly: "There was so much excitement and everything, how is a man to remember exactly what he said?"

"Answer the question," directed the judge.

"Isn't it true that you described the second man as 'shuffling' down Crescent Avenue?" pursued Baldridge.

"I don't know!" retorted Sturgis.

"You must know whether you used that word!"

"Perhaps I did," the witness admitted.

"As a matter of fact you did notice the peculiar gait of the man who turned back when the other went toward Mrs. Spalding's."

"Try to remember," urged the judge quietly.

Simeon Sturgis did try. Consciously, at least, he forgot his distrust of Washington Baldridge. But whether or not he was influenced by some prejudice of that subconscious mind that man cannot control, it was with unmistakable sincerity that he repeated that he did not know.

Mrs. West sniffed contemptuously: "The old fool!" Then she suggested in an audible whisper: "Put me on the stand." But Baldridge knew that any such second-hand testimony as to what Sturgis had seen would have little weight even if allowed. As for Mrs. West, she was utterly crushed.

Pendleton stood by expectantly. Baldridge, beaten at every turn, surrendered the witness.

Sturgis was perceptibly easier when he found himself in the hands of the champion of righteousness and the defender of the people.

"Now, Mr. Sturgis," said Pendleton pleasantly, "my worthy opponent seems to think you described one of the men as 'shuffling.' It is even possible that you did, isn't it?"

"Yes," admitted Sturgis agreeably.

"But it is hardly likely that both men shuffled?"

"Hardly," Sturgis smiled.

"And we may assume from Mr. Baldridge's questioning," went on Pendleton confidently, "that you applied the descriptive verb to the actions of only one of the men."

"I object!" interrupted Baldridge, and the court sustained him in the face of formality. But Pendleton was content, having brought the point before the jury in preparation for the next question: "Only one of the men you saw passed under the light?"

"The one that went toward Mrs. Spalding's," answered Sturgis fortuitously.

Pendleton let it rest at that. Clearly the inference was that if Sturgis had identified the gait of either it was of the one

who had passed under the light on his way to the cottage where the little old lady was killed.

At this point Brent left the court-room.

Soon after that the court recessed, with the summing up and charge to the jury set for the afternoon session.

## CHAPTER XVII.

### LOST—AND FOUND.

THE confusion in Philip Brent's mind had to some extent abated. Later he discovered that he was mistaken, that the greatest ordeal was still ahead, but at the time he believed he had decided on the course to be followed.

This man Madden was innocent. Even the vague knowledge that Brent had would avert the tragedy that threatened. If Peggy Archer told what she knew they could never convict Madden. Peggy must tell.

Brent had at first considered revealing immediately the fact that the girl was concealing circumstances that should be known. But this idea was discarded.

Whatever Peggy Archer's secret might be, Brent realized that it had a tremendous hold on her. He was sure she kept it unwillingly. His purpose now was to make a supreme effort to persuade her to tell all that she knew. To that end, he was on his way home. There he discovered a staggering development.

Mammy met him at the door with the news that "Miss Peggy" was gone.

"Gone!" echoed Brent. "What do you mean by that?"

"That she's done gone off with all her clothes," explained the old colored woman, "and she tell me: 'Good-by, Mammy,' and say: 'Give Mister Phil this note.'"

Brent found himself reading a brief message from a single folded sheet of writing paper that the unaddressed envelope held.

There was no salutation and no signature. It said simply:

I've been very weak and selfish and blind. Try to forgive me.

Not a word as to where she went or why.

But what difference could "why" and "where" make. The important thing was that she *had* gone: that with Madden facing certain death the one person who could save him had fled.

And Brent was honest enough to see that even now it was not of Madden alone he thought. For she had gone, too, from him, Philip Brent. Now, as never before, Brent realized how much she meant to him, how hopelessly he was in love with those wistful blue eyes. And she was gone!

"Weak—selfish—blind," repeated Brent. She was all of that, and more. She had lied, lied every minute she had kept silent while Madden was being tried for a murder he did not do. And by the lie, that lying silence, she was taking Madden's life just as surely and a thousand times more cruelly than if he had shot him.

And what was Brent's share in it! If he had spoken before, the girl would have had to tell what she knew. Now it was too late. She was gone.

The case against Madden had been conclusive. Brent's belated report might delay the condemning of the man, and again it might not. For a certainty it would discredit Brent.

To tell the little that he knew, admitting that he knew it before Madden went to trial, would simultaneously destroy the character of the woman he loved and bring dishonor to himself. But always there was the dim consciousness of Madden, useless as a man could be—but innocent.

Brent had always been impulsive—not now. He had always been emotional—but not now. He had always thought of right as right, and wrong as wrong; of honor as the most sacred thing in life. Now Brent realized that he had first compromised when he had agreed to guard the girl's secret. If he could remake the decision, would it be different? Brent wondered. His honor as a gentleman? His love as a man? But he must think!

This thing would ruin him. More than that, it would ruin Peggy Archer. Was Madden worth it. Was Brent to sacrifice himself and the woman he loved for a man who meant nothing to either of them, meant nothing to any one, perhaps, Mad-

den himself. But it was a man's life he was arguing about!

Then the professional Brent was called in consultation, not consciously, but he was there, the doctor who had seen men die was there. Life was rather a cheap thing; death part of the day's work. He was quite callous to it—but Madden was innocent.

Madden might as well be dead. He would have to die some time. What if he were acquitted? Wouldn't he go on as he had before, with life more of a burden than anything else?

How much did he owe Madden, anyway? The man was nothing to him, just a piece of human driftwood carried into his life by some capricious tide of Fate. Three weeks before he had not known such a man existed. Then, circumstances—

That was it, the whole thing was just a set of circumstances. Brent had had nothing to do with shaping them, they had reached out and caught him! And if he told, it was the end of everything for him—and for her.

Brent burned with a sudden hatred of Madden. What if he wasn't guilty! He was worthless, good-for-nothing. It might just as well have been he who murdered Mrs. Spalding. And he had lied! Brent had heard him lie, there in the morgue when he had made his perjured identification of the man who had been killed in the railroad yard.

What if they did convict him! It was no concern of Brent's. He had asked nothing of Madden. Madden had no claim on him. This was every man for himself. What if he were innocent? If he wasn't a fool he could prove it. It was his own fault if they found him guilty! And suppose they did? Suppose Madden died down in the State's prison? That would end it.

Yes, that would end it, Mrs. Spalding's death would be explained, the law would have exacted the penalty. Soon it would all be forgotten. Then Brent could find Peggy—he would find her somewhere—then—

Meanwhile Pendleton was well along with his summing up. It was a masterpiece. Afterward Juror No. 3 admitted admiring-

ly that "It made you feel as if some one was settin' there behind the judge, watchin' everything to see that it went along all right."

Nearly two hours after Philip Brent reached his home, mammy appeared in the doorway of the study, paused and surveyed him in a worried way.

"Doan you fret, Mr. Phil," she soothed him, "Miss Peggy ain't goin' to stay away for long."

"Did she say—"

"No, she didn't say nuthin' only jes' what I tol' you. But I know Miss Peggy, I do. What you doin' with yo' hat still on yo' haid?"

"I'm just going out," said Brent, rising. For Brent had at last reached his decision.

It was a selfish decision, Brent told himself. It wasn't that he wanted Madden to be free, but because he himself wanted to be free. He had realized that the one thing from which he could not escape was himself. Silence now would sell him into bondage: he would be forever the slave of the past.

Brent started for the court-house to tell what he knew.

A drizzling rain had set in, but Brent was not aware of it. His errand, stopping the trial of Madden for murder, was vividly before him. Nothing else existed.

In the court-house, Brent went directly to the judge's private chambers. Not until his hand was on the door-knob did he hesitate. Then it was not to reconsider his decision, but merely to weigh the wisdom of waiting for the judge to come from the court-room. The alternative was entering the court-room and declaring himself there.

Brent concluded that a private interview with the judge would be if anything more effective than an announcement in open court. And, too, there was a possibility that the thing might be handled quietly if he were to talk to the judge alone, and that would spare Peggy some of the shock. He opened the door.

As Brent stepped into the room, he discovered a woman was seated in a chair beside the window, looking out at the gray blur of sky.

"I beg your pardon," stammered Brent.  
 "Phil!" was the frightened exclamation,  
 and Brent found himself facing Peggy  
 Archer.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### PEGGY CONFESSES.

**P**EGGY ARCHER'S approach along the corridor that led to the judge's chamber had driven to cover a man who had been hovering there restlessly for the better part of an hour. The man was Bob Genroe.

Genroe, his dirty, ragged clothes of the road replaced by a cheap new suit, might have been there for any one of several reasons. Perhaps morbid curiosity had drawn him to the place where "Shufflin' Joe" Madden was on trial for his life. Genroe was a sallow, shrunken man, with eyes that burned feverishly bright. The left eyelid drooped, his nostrils were abnormally wide, and the thin lips twitched nervously. Morbid curiosity may have explained his presence in the court-house.

Or, again, it is possible that Genroe had some half-formed intention of surrendering himself in Madden's place, for it was Genroe and not Madden who had gone to the little cottage in Maple street.

Just why Genroe was there perhaps even he could not have explained. The thin vial of white powder in his pocket may have had something to do with it. But he was there, in that corridor, when Peggy turned into it. Genroe did not see her. At the sound of the footsteps he shrank into a doorway. And it happened that the door was unlocked, and swung open. Genroe stepped inside. The room was dark.

In the darkness Genroe made out that it was an antechamber of the main court-room, separated from it by a solid door. But above the door was a transom. Although Genroe did not know it, this was the room of the court clerk and stenographer. The light of glass above the door was his sole interest. With the transom opening into the court, he saw at once that it exactly suited his purpose.

Genroe had meant to seat himself among

the spectators at the rear of the court-room. But he had arrived to find that the summing up was already in progress, and the doors locked according to custom. This, however, had decided advantages.

Genroe locked the door to the outer corridor and cautiously pushed to the other door a desk that stood against the wall. This done, he lifted a chair to its top. Before mounting to his post at the transom Genroe shook some of the white powder onto the back of his hand and drew it into his nostrils. Then he climbed to his perch on the chair atop the table.

The room in which Brent discovered Peggy a short time later was like that in which Genroe in seeking refuge had found a place of vantage. But it differed from the other apartment in the detail of the door leading into the court-room.

From the judge's chamber a short corridor led to the court-room. There were doors at both ends of this passageway, and neither of them was fitted with a transom. Both doors were closed.

Before Brent recovered from his surprise, the girl was speaking.

"Oh, but I'm glad you've come, Phil!" she cried. "It's such a terrible thing. I don't believe—alone—"

Brent took her in his arms. "Why did you run away from me?" he asked softly.

The girl shook her head. "I'm going to tell you—"

Brent soothed her.

"Phil, dear," she sighed gratefully.

He kissed the eyelids that closed those brave, tired eyes. And he waited in silence, for he knew that when the strength came she would speak. Peggy stirred, then began, in a low, uncertain voice.

"Just as I told Pendleton," she said, "when I found the money was gone I thought that perhaps my mother had been the victim of thieves. But I never suspected it was Bob until the last I heard of him he was in Seattle, Washington."

"Yes," Brent urged quietly.

"I never imagined it might be he," said the girl, "until that night—we were all in the kitchen, you know—I fainted—my brother had looked in through that window—"

Peggy sobbed, mastered herself, and continued: "He told me afterward that he had come back to kill the parrot—"

"Then you've seen him?"

The girl gave a hysterical assent. "That night," she panted, "the night a man was in my room. It was Bob—"

"And you protected him!" gasped Brent, "when he had killed—"

"He didn't do it," protested the girl piteously. "Bob was shiftless, weak, a ne'er-do-weel—but he couldn't do that—" Horror stood in the girl's eyes.

"Oh, just at first, I thought so, too," she breathed, reading the doubt in Brent's face. "But I saw that he couldn't—I know that he didn't."

"What then?" asked Brent.

"Bob was a wanderer," continued Peggy. "His wife—that girl you were called in to see—he left her. Mother discovered she was living at a little village in Connecticut and brought her to the cottage. And he was always turning up and asking for money—that was why I changed my name to Peggy Archer—he couldn't face mother as easily as me, but she must have helped him out a great many times."

The girl paused again, gathered herself, and went on: "He says it was money he was after that night. It was the first time he had been home in nearly three years. He had a key to the kitchen door—he opened it—mother was in her room in the front of the house, off the parlor.

"Bob—he called himself Bob Genroe—"

"The man Madden talks of," said Brent.

Peggy nodded. "Bob went to that loose brick—"

"He was going to steal—"

"No," said the girl, "he told me he wanted to find how much money was there so he would know what to ask for. While he was there mother came in from the front of the house. His back was to her. She did not recognize Bob. Evidently all she saw was the man at the hiding-place of her money—and she must have screamed: 'Police! Robbers! Help!' for it is all true about the parrot. Bob is in terror of the parrot."

Again the girl paused.

"The shock of discovery must have killed

mother," she resumed, "for as Bob faced her she fell forward—her head struck the table—"

"But the finger-prints?" objected Brent.

"When Bob saw she was dead," explained the girl, "he was afraid that he would be held for murder. He took some of the gray hairs and stuck them on the table to strengthen the explanation that she had fallen."

"He took the money," observed Brent.

"Yes," faltered Peggy, "but I've told you he was weak—it's pitiful."

"You say he came back that night to kill the parrot," puzzled Brent. "Why didn't he do it before he left?"

"He told me that it didn't occur to him then," she explained. "All he could think of was getting away from those screams of: 'Police! Robbers! Help!' over and over again. It wasn't until later that he became afraid of the consequences—then it was too late."

There was a long pause before Brent asked: "Why did you take all your things from the house?"

"Can't you see?" asked the girl. "I've made a fearful mess of things. I believed Bob's story, but I didn't think others would. It seemed certain that he would be brought to trial. It was a fearful thing—fearful. I didn't believe they could convict Madden of murder! Why, he's innocent!"

"I didn't think so, either," said Brent grimly. "I never realized before what a terrible mistake could be made."

When he spoke again it was to repeat the question: "Why did you leave the house?"

"Could I stay," she asked quickly, "when within an hour or so I'll be in the nastiest kind of scandal—my brother a murderer—oh, they'll accuse him of it—and I—don't they call it 'an accessory after the fact'?" She laughed hysterically. "Can't you see what it will mean when I admit that I kept quiet all the time the man was on trial? I went to the Inn, to spare Nan—and you—"

"But you meant all the time to tell if the case was going against Madden?" Brent was trying to construct a defense.

Peggy shook her head. "No, no," she

protested. "It was my own brother—I never meant to tell—I was weak—selfish—blind!"

"You're here now—" began Brent.

"Do you know why?" she asked, her eyes misty. "It's because, as I came into court this morning—passing a little room just down the hall—I heard that parrot scolding: 'Elsie! Where are you Elsie!'"

"I couldn't forget it," gasped Peggy. "Where was I? Where was the little girl who used to hide herself away in the most amazing places to read—whose mother used to call for her until the parrot took it up? Sometimes, at first, I pretended not to hear so the parrot would call. I had strayed a long way—a very long way. Everything had changed. I was a different person, I had grown up into a new world—then that parrot, and its words—I was a little girl again—that's why I'm here."

The girl sobbed.

Some one was opening the door from the court-room. There were rapid steps, then the door at the nearer end of the passage-way opened to admit the judge.

But Brent and the girl never told their stories, for before they had a chance to speak the judge exclaimed: "Dr. Brent! Just the man we want!"

## CHAPTER XIX.

"GO TO SCHOOL, BOB!"

GENROE'S throat was dry as he heard Pendleton's terrific arraignment of Madden. The prosecutor condemned him not alone to the death that the law exacts, but down into hell itself. Genroe ached from the long continued constraint in which he had been standing at the transom. The vial had been emptied of its powdered contents.

Now Baldrige was making his last stand in a lost cause. Baldrige was at his best in summing up, but Pendleton had delivered himself with tremendous effect. Genroe knew what was going to happen to Madden. Still, the fascination of it held the man who listened at the transom.

Counsel for the defense was working up his final plea when the trial of "Shufflin'

Joe" Madden was swept from an orderly proceeding into a wild storm.

Breathless and tense at the transom, Bob Genroe, who believed he was alone in the darkened room, heard a shrill voice behind him cry: "Elsie, Elsie, where are you, Elsie?"

Like the slash of a knife those words came from the darkness—from the past.

With a scream Genroe straightened up, lost his balance, pitched to the floor.

At that cry of terror every sound in the court-room was silenced. The thud of Genroe's body and the crash of the overturned chair were plainly heard, and above them the parrot's high-pitched complaint: "What's the matter! What's the matter!"

The first to reach the room found Genroe rolling on the floor, moaning: "I didn't kill her! I didn't kill her!"

The judge had immediately ordered the court-room cleared, then, with the prosecutor, Baldrige, Madden, and the jurymen, had crowded into the anteroom with the parrot shrieking its endless cries.

But after his first protests of innocence, Genroe only kept groaning: "I'll die. Get a doctor! I'm going to die. A doctor!"

Among others the judge had gone off to telephone—and found Brent.

"We've got to keep him alive. He knows something," said the judge excitedly, as Brent and he hurried to the room where Genroe lay, leaving Peggy where Brent had found her.

Brent was still in the dark as to whom the judge was speaking of, and was until, in brushing past Madden, he heard the man whispering hoarsely over and over: "It's him! It's Genroe! It's him!"

Brent's first glance told him the man stretched on the floor was in a bad way. Internal injuries, and, probably, from the way he breathed, a lung punctured by a rib. Perhaps other and more serious hurts. An examination would tell. He asked the others to withdraw.

No sooner were they alone than Genroe asked jerkily: "You're Brent, aren't you?"

Brent nodded.

"And—you know—Elsie?"

"Yes," said Brent, continuing his swift examination.

"Police! Robbers! Help!" shrieked the parrot. Genroe's tortured eyes tried to locate the bird, but he could not turn his head. It was the first Brent had noticed that he couldn't.

"I'm going to die, ain't I?" asked the man.

"Well—" began Brent.

"Don't try to smooth it over, doc."

"You can't move your head?"

"No."

"Fall, wasn't it?"

"Yes—looks pretty bad, don't it?"

Brent nodded. Then he said suddenly: "See here, Genroe, I know you're Spalding—"

"Don't!" Genroe cried wildly, then, with a twisted smile: "May as well keep that quiet. No one knows it but Elsie. And you know Elsie—and she's all right, Elsie is—and if, if—do you think I'll die?"

"I don't know."

"If I thought it was all—" mused Genroe, then exclaimed: "Oh, hell, I'll take a chance. You tell Elsie not to identify me, and I'll never let on that the old lady—"

Genroe's voice was getting weaker.

"I'll tell them," he whispered.

"Here, kitty. Come, kitty," teased the parrot.

"Damn that parrot!" grunted Genroe, then went on: "I'll let on that I was just a bo lookin' through the window, saw the old lady hiding the money, went in, and she got frightened and her heart flopped on her—how's that? Oh, I'll tell them something."

Genroe was seized with a spasm of coughing. When it eased, he smiled. "Had Madden dead to rights, didn't they?"

Brent continued working over him.

"Guess I'm done for, eh, doc?"

A pause. Then Genroe said again: "I figure that keepin' quiet about who I am would kind of be doing the decent thing by the old lady. You tell Elsie not to blow it. Oh! Don't do that again, doc! And say, supposin' I should die right off! Madden's in pretty bad—"

Brent had been thinking of that from the first.

The parrot had quieted down.

"Better call 'em in now," suggested Genroe weakly, "I'm getting kind of cold and numb, and there's no good of Madden—the reason I yelled for a doctor was because I thought they'd get you—and Elsie told me—say, get 'em in here quick, will you?"

Brent was summoning the others.

He heard Genroe tell the whole story, the last very faintly. And Brent helped guide his hand in making the cross that was all Genroe's strength would permit in the way of a signature. Around it the court stenographer who had taken the halting confession down in long-hand had printed: "Robert Genroe, his mark."

At that Brent thought that the man glanced at him with a faint gleam of amusement in the dulling eyes.

For a moment there was no sound but the man's breathing.

Suddenly the parrot began to repeat: "What's the matter?"

Genroe roused himself surprisingly. "Where's Madden?" he demanded.

"Here," said Madden huskily.

"Can't see you, Joe." Genroe's voice had again dropped to a whisper. "But I guess this is so long."

Madden was crying.

Again there was silence, except for the sound of Genroe's breathing.

Then the parrot again. And this time it shrilled: "Go to school, Bob; go to school, Bob!" But Bob did not hear.

Six months later Elsie Spalding again changed her name—from Peggy Archer to Mrs. Philip Brent. On the recovery of County Physician Jackson, Dr. Brent had closed his practise and moved to New York, where mammy was given dominion over a pleasant apartment on Central Park West to which Brent brought his bride.

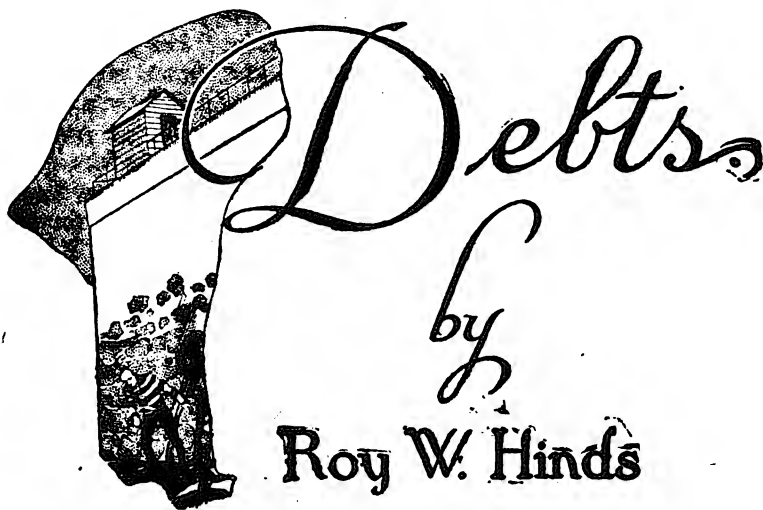
Thornton Pendleton retired from active office-holding to employ his talents as political boss of his district.

Simeon Sturgis owns a small apartment-house just built on the ground where the little cottage stood.

Madden? Drifted off somewhere. Brent never heard of him again.

Mrs. West has the parrot.

(The end.)



# Debts

by  
Roy W. Hinds

**T**HEY parted in the yard of the big prison. The breakfast line marched from the mess-hall; a grim-faced, weary procession, representing in the aggregate of their "time" an age of stifling toil.

As the line passed through the gate into the yard, it broke, and the prisoners, singly and in scattered groups, proceeded easily and less precisely to the point where various crews were checked into the industrial departments for the day's work. The yard became a scene of quickening activity as the mess-hall continued to yield score after score of men.

For the most part these men plodded straight ahead to the checking station. Others dallied, knowing their particular crew would not be called until the last. They took advantage of the precious few minutes to gossip—perhaps to plot.

But there was one man in the line who turned his face happily away from the checking station. For eight heavy years he had marched into that yard from the mess-hall, and thence to the checking station. But he had eaten his last meal in that prison; he had merely pecked at his breakfast, in his brightening eyes the far-away look of a man who sees a vision. He had checked out to the shops for the last time.

His gaze, for the moment, fell upon the line of prisoners following him into the yard. He stood in the morning sunlight

beside a rock wall. Far above his head towered a cell-house, a mountain of calamity.

Just now his attention was claimed by the incoming line of prisoners. Soon his face would turn through the big gates up front, and his steps find their way into the wide-open freedom of the outside. His eyes gleamed with hope.

Daniel Rodd was due to go out that morning. He had completed a ten-year sentence in something like eight years. It was all over now. His breath came in quick, fitful gasps as full realization of the day came to him.

He felt smothered. His heart thumped wildly, gladly, and so furiously that its current stifled his lungs. The shifting throngs of prisoners moved about close at hand; yet it all seemed a spectacle viewed from a great distance. His fancy had flown over the walls and away. The present was dim as the past. His flesh quivered; his limbs weakened.

Daniel Rodd was smitten with fear. Suppose the excitement should prove too much for him? Suppose the ordeal of eight terrible years were to end in death of nervous heart-failure at the final hour? He thought of his family, and took a grip upon himself.

The line was still filing into the yard. Occasionally a prisoner stopped to shake the hands of Daniel Rodd and to mumble good wishes. Many asked him to under-

take missions for them. Did he accede to all these requests, he would traverse the entire country and spend a fortune. Nearly all the prisoners gazed upon him enviously, yearning for the wonderful thing that had come to Daniel Rodd.

Presently there appeared a certain prisoner who awakened a keen interest in Rodd. His eye kindled affectionately. The man shuffled straight to where Rodd stood.

"I'm glad you're goin' out, Dan," said he.

"I know you be, Phil," Rodd returned, "and I'm goin' to do all I can to fetch you out."

Philip Buckley's eyes glowed for a moment, and then his face fell morosely. "I wouldn't waste no time on that," he advised, though not very heartily. "A man that's been in prison can't do much for another man that's still in. But I'm thankin' you just the same, Dan."

"I can work, can't I, Phil? I can hire a lawyer to see after your case—and I guess he'll know better about such things, won't he?"

"I expect he will, Dan."

"Of course he will," Rodd went on positively. "Just like I told you before, Phil, there ain't nobody on the outside ever took up your case right. I'll get a smart lawyer after it, Phil, and—and you wait and see! Why, they'll be dressin' you out here some day soon."

Phil's eye brightened. The prospect of being "dressed out" was alluring, though painted simply by a fellow convict. For a moment his breast was fired by a spark struck from his friend's enthusiasm.

"It's the only chance I got, Dan," said he. "If nobody on the outside looks out for me, I don't see how I'm goin' to do it in here. I ain't got nothing to look ahead to, Dan, if somebody on the outside don't help me." His voice dropped to a numb monotone as he went on: "I'm doin' life, and—"

"You ain't doin' life!" Dan interjected sharply. "Your time ain't no longer than it 'll take me to get a smart lawyer to workin'. If I was you, Phil, I'd quit thinkin' about life."

"Well," Phil rejoined practically, "life is what they give me."

"That's all right if they did, but there ain't no call for you to be so set on doin' it. There's been men in here with life that didn't do it, ain't there? You been in here fourteen years, Phil, and you know other lifers that went out on pardon, don't you?"

"Yes," Phil admitted, "and I know lots of 'em that went out in a pine box."

"I feel like cuffin' you, Phil Buckley!" Dan reprimanded his companion. "Trouble is, you're set on doin' life. Seems like you just want to do it. Give me a chance, Phil, and I'll show you. You just wait and see."

"It's mighty good of you, Dan," Phil assured his friend. "I ain't sayin' you won't do all you can—and maybe you can do a lot. I'll never forget you, Dan, whether I get out or not; and I know that if I don't get out, it won't be no fault of yourn." They clasped hands. "Good-by, Dan," whispered Phil. "I'll have to be driftin' down to the check-house, or they'll be yellin' out my number and I won't be there."

"Good-by, Phil," said Dan. His voice came near breaking, but he smiled and went on cheerfully. "Good-by, and cheer up. I'll get you out, Phil—just wait and see!"

Phil Buckley, lifer, shuffled away. Daniel Rodd surveyed his bent shoulders—the shoulders of an old man, yet Phil was scarcely at middle age. At the summons of a guard, Rodd went up front to be dressed out. In a half-hour he stepped outside the prison gates.

Thus did the two friends part.

Late that night Daniel Rodd came to the little farmhouse and the patient family from which he had been separated eight years.

The oldest boy was now eighteen, the youngest twelve. The latter barely remembered his father. He was to the lad a dim figure associated with his mother's tears—many, many years ago, and at intervals since. He was the man who wrote letters to his mother and made her cry. He saw him now as a man old beyond

his forty-odd years, and didn't know yet whether he liked him or not.

The older boy had a clearer recollection of the family tragedy. He recalled that his father had quarreled with a neighbor; that the two men exchanged threats; that each man's live stock was mysteriously slain; that finally the neighbor's barn was burned, and that his father was sent to prison for ten years on a charge of arson. He recalled talk of circumstantial evidence, but the term at that time meant nothing to the boy.

His mother had explained it since, and now he had a very definite idea that his father had served eight years in prison for a crime he did not commit. He pitied his father, and his natural affection grew warmer.

It is doubtful whether Daniel Rodd had aged more rapidly than his wife. The eight years had been a struggle. Neither she nor the children had been to the prison to see Daniel Rodd. He didn't wish them to see him there. The wife was a frail woman now, white-haired and pinched. She knew he was due home almost any day, but wasn't certain of the time.

She stared numbly at him as he came through the door. The greetings were simple. The man was awed by the change in his sons. Few words were spoken, though there was deep affection there. The mother gazed from her husband to her children, and back again.

Then she collapsed, and the man and his boys had to watch over her almost all night. She bore up bravely, however, and a quiet calm succeeded the excitement of joy almost too great to be true.

Such was the family to which Daniel Rodd returned. The little farm had a livelihood in it, and the skilful farmer and his boys set about their struggle with the soil.

Daniel Rodd's wasted frame grew strong again. His muscles hardened, his eye cleared, his step grew steady and firm, and some of his old-time gaiety came back. Soon the family was upon grounds of affectionate intimacy. The small boy decided he liked his father better than any other man in the world. The wife and mother grew stronger, too. The farm

began to prosper. It was a happy family, growing happier.

And yet there was something pressing on the mind of Daniel Rodd.

"Sarah," said he to his wife one evening, "there's a man out there"—he swept his arm in the general direction of the prison—"that I ought to do something for."

She gazed inquiringly. "You mean in—that place?" she asked.

Rodd went on: "Yes, in that place. He was the best friend I had there. When I first went in they put us together in the same—the same room. He helped me a lot, and didn't have any reason to help me, except that he wanted to be my friend."

"Has he got a wife—a family?" the woman inquired.

"No," answered Rodd. "He ain't got no family, no near relatives, nor even any friends out here that 'll help him—unless I go to the front for him."

"Will he be there long?"

"They give him life," said Rodd.

The woman drew a deep, fluttering breath. "Life," she whispered. "And he's got no friends."

"Only me." They exchanged glances silently. "He saved me several times when I broke the rules," pursued the husband. "He saved me quite a stretch of good time, I guess, in the four years we were together. He took pains to make things easy for me."

"Four years we were together—and then we got shifted to different gangs, and lived in different parts of the—that place. For four years I saw him only once in a while. But all that time I never forgot what I promised him. I saw him the day I come away, and promised him again. He's dependin' on me. If I don't help him, he's lost—he'll do life."

Presently the woman asked: "What can you do?"

"Get a lawyer," Rodd told her, "to prepare papers and get up a petition to the Governor. There's a sight of work to it. The judge and the jury have to sign the papers. There's nobody can do it except a lawyer."

"And a lawyer costs money," she suggested quietly.

"A lawyer costs money," he agreed, "and we ain't got much money. But," he added slowly, "I'm thinkin' whether I shouldn't give all I got, or all we got. It's family money, but don't we owe that man a debt that's got to be paid, same's a debt for meat and sugar? I ask you, Sarah, do we owe him anything, and can we pay it now?"

She studied her husband thoughtfully. "Life," she whispered reflectively, and added: "Yes, we'd better pay him."

And so it happened that Daniel Rodd went to town next day and hired a lawyer. He paid the fee, and it took all the family savings.

The lawyer investigated the case of Philip Buckley. He went to the town from which Buckley had been sent up. He interviewed the judge who had sentenced him, but failed to get his signature to a petition for the pardoning of Phil Buckley. The judge was very hard-cased in his professional opinion of the justice he dealt out.

"I sentenced Philip Buckley to life imprisonment," said the judge. "I do not err in my judgments. He received justice at that time, and it still is justice that he serve life in prison."

The county attorney who prosecuted Buckley was dead. Three of the jurors also were dead. Two others had moved to far-away States. The attorney interviewed the seven remaining jurors, and got six of them to sign the petition. He also got the signatures of a score of reputable citizens who had known Philip Buckley. He went to the prison and got the signature of the warden and a statement that Buckley had been a model prisoner, well-behaved and obedient.

Then the lawyer took the petition to the Governor.

Two months went by. The Governor neglected to act. Daniel Rodd wrote Philip Buckley frequently, acquainting him with the progress of his appeal, step by step. His letters were cheerful, and the man doing a life sentence was swept high on a wave of hope.

Then the Governor acted on the petition. He denied it.

The lawyer brought the Governor's verdict to Daniel Rodd. It was a severe blow to Rodd and his family. His wife and boys had become fond of Philip Buckley, though they knew him only through the stories told by the father. They were earnestly desirous of seeing Philip Buckley set free. The blow fell hard. Philip Buckley, it seemed, was doomed to serve his life sentence, and the savings of Daniel Rodd's family were swept away.

For three days Rodd went about his work like a man in a trance. Finally he whipped up courage to write Buckley and tell him the sad news.

He was a crude letter-writer, but he made it as soft as he could. He told him the Governor had turned down the petition, but at once assured him that the fight was not yet over. He made no definite promises, for he hardly knew what to promise; but he did beseech Buckley to keep up his courage. He pledged his life to the task of getting his friend out of prison, and entreated him to "wait and see."

Buckley, in prison, read Rodd's letter. His fate weighed heavily upon him. He read and reread the cheerful words in which Rodd had stated a dismal fact. And throughout the letter that fact stood forth, boldly and harshly.

The petition had been denied. The Governor believed Philip Buckley should spend the remainder of his life in prison. The prisoner knew he was doomed. That horrible reality bore in upon him unmercifully. It pursued his every thought. It became an awful certainty.

He had long ago despaired, but lately hope had been high—and the crash left him more utterly desolate than ever. His gratitude to Daniel Rodd was boundless—yet he was doomed. Rodd had spent all his money to get Buckley out of prison, and yet Buckley was doomed. And then the lifer cast his eye about him and began to think of certain things.

Late one night Daniel Rodd was awakened by a knock at the door of his farmhouse.

He went to the door, with a notion that perhaps a neighbor was ill. The season was early winter, and at nightfall a light snow had set in. Glancing out of a window, Daniel Rodd observed that a thin coverlet of white spread over the earth. Gray moonlight illuminated the night.

Rodd reached the door and stood for a moment with his hand on the bolt.

"Who's there?" he demanded.

"It's me, Dan," came a soft voice from outside.

Rodd recognized the tones of Buckley, yet the presence of that man was so improbable that he hesitated.

"Is that you, Phil Buckley?" he inquired.

"Yes, it's me—Phil Buckley."

Rodd opened the door. His old friend of the prison, a hunted look on his face, slunk into the house.

The men clasped hands silently. At a sign from Daniel Rodd the visitor dropped into a chair beside the kitchen stove, and huddled there while the farmer stirred up the fire. The two men seemed to understand each other, and neither spoke.

The family was soon awake. The wife of Daniel Rodd appeared with a shawl about her shoulders, for the house was chilled. Instinctively she knew the visitor's identity, and she gazed upon him compassionately. The boys came from their beds and regarded the stranger quietly. An atmosphere of momentous events hovered over the farmhouse. Not until he had the fire burning brightly did Daniel Rodd speak.

"Sarah, and boys," he said, moving his solemn eyes from one face to another, "this is Phil Buckley, my friend."

The woman and her sons nodded to the man beside the stove. He turned his face, soiled by rough travel, up to them and nodded. The woman came to his side and shook his hand.

"You're welcome, Mr. Buckley," she said simply.

"Thanks, ma'am," said Buckley.

Daniel Rodd said: "Sarah, maybe you and the boys better go back to bed. It's likely that Phil and me will want to have a talk."

The farmer went out of the room with his family and returned soon more fully dressed. The two men were alone.

"I expect you run off, Phil," said Daniel Rodd.

"Yes," the fugitive told him, "I run off."

"How did you manage it, Phil?"

"It took me eight days," Buckley related. His voice was husky, and, in the manner of fugitives, his gaze traveled restlessly. "Eight days, but I made it. I hid out for seven days, Dan, under the bakery. I heard 'em beatin' up the prison for six days. Then, I reckon, they decided I'd got outside the walls. On the mornin' of the eighth day I got into the guard-tower back of the bakery and hid in a closet under the stairway. That night I crept out and dropped over the wall."

"Eight days," Daniel Rodd repeated.

"And what 'd you eat all that time, Phil?"

"Nothing but bread that I stole out of the bakery at night; dry bread. Every night I'd drink my fill of water in the bakery and then dodge back with a hunk of bread. It was hell, 'Dan, layin' in that hole."

"I don't see how you stood it."

"I had life to do," said the fugitive simply. "A man can stand anything, if he's gettin' away from that." He glanced around the room and went on: "It took me five days, travelin' at night, to get here. I begged food at farmhouses—but not much."

Daniel Rodd thereupon bethought himself and got cold food for his visitor. He warmed coffee, and the man ate ravenously. He knew he was safe, for the moment at least, but nevertheless his eyes roved apprehensively.

Daniel Rodd studied the newcomer thoughtfully. "Where 'd you get them clothes, Phil?" he asked.

"Them clothes," repeated Buckley, surveying the ill-assorted garments. "Oh, I picked 'em up in prison, a piece at a time. They're trusty clothes."

His host meditated. "If they're prison clothes," he said, "you'd better get rid of 'em."

Phil's eye brightened. "I'd like to do

that," he said. "And, Dan, I'm still wearin' underclothes with numbers stamped on 'em."

It wasn't long before Philip Buckley was rigged out in an entirely new outfit of clothing; worn garments to be sure, but not one of them that ever saw the inside of a prison.

The fugitive finished his meal and resumed his chair beside the kitchen stove. Daniel Rodd mused.

"What do you aim to do, Phil?" he inquired.

Buckley gazed helplessly into Rodd's face. "I don't know," he admitted. "I can't do much."

"You want to get way off from this State, I s'pose?"

"I'd like to; but they must be huntin' pretty close for me."

"There ain't no doubt about that—they're huntin'. If you had money, you could make it; but I don't see how you're goin' to tramp out of the State without somebody pickin' you up. The whole State knows by this time that a life prisoner has escaped—at least all the officers in the State know it; and they'll be watchin'."

"You're right about that, Dan," said Phil, alarmed.

"And," Daniel Rodd pursued slowly, "it ain't no easy thing for you to get money. I'm the only friend you got—and I ain't got no money. That's one thing I can't give you, Phil. I'm sorry."

"I didn't expect you would have money," Buckley assured him, "and I don't know as I'd take it if you had. You spent an awful lot, Dan, on that petition; and, Dan, I think I'd go back to prison before I'd take another cent away from you and your family."

"If I had it, you'd take it," said Dan quietly, "but I ain't got it. I can't get it, and we'll—"

"I thought, Dan," the fugitive suggested appealingly, "that you could hide me for a few days, or maybe longer, till things cooled down a bit. Then I could sneak away, and not bother you no more."

Daniel Rodd meditated. A thoughtful frown gathered on his face. He moved nervously around the room. Finally he

reached a decision, and stood before Buckley.

"Phil," he said, "I'm goin' to hide you; I'm going to help you; but you and me both understand what it means to me. It's a crime to help an escaped prisoner. They can send me back to prison for a couple of years, maybe, if they catch you and find out that I helped you. It's a dangerous thing, Phil, but I'm goin' to take the chance. If it wasn't for the family I wouldn't hesitate a second. It was the family that made me go slow, Phil; but now I've decided. I'm goin' to help you."

Buckley deliberated now, as though he had seen a light. Finally he announced: "I don't know as I'm goin' to let you help me, Dan. It ain't right, and I—"

"You ain't got anything to say about it," Daniel Rodd interrupted. "I'm the man that's made the decision, and you're goin' to do what I say."

"But s'posin' I won't let you do anything for me?"

"You ain't goin' to act that way, Phil. I wouldn't feel right in my mind if I turned you away. It would spoil the rest of my life, and I ain't goin' to do it. I'll feel better if I help you. And, besides, Phil, I've helped you already. I've fed you and gave you clothes instead of draggin' you into town and turnin' you over to the officers. I'm just as guilty as I'll ever be, and I can't turn back now—and wouldn't if I could. Yes, Phil," he stated with finality, "I'm goin' to help you."

"It's mighty good of you, Dan," Phil rejoined, "but I don't feel right about it."

"We ain't goin' to think about that now," Daniel Rodd persisted. "I can't keep you here. The officers know that you and me was friends in prison, and they know that I worked hard to get you pardoned. They might get an idea that you'd come to me for help, and maybe they'll be payin' me a visit. I can't keep you here, but I know a place for you."

"Where is it?"

"A mile up the river, in the woods, is an old shack. It's called Robinson's shack, and is s'posed to be haunted; but we all know there ain't no such things as haunted houses. But nobody ever goes near it. It

sets on a piece of high ground in the middle of a stretch of swamp, and nobody ever has any business there—not even boys. There's an old brick fireplace in the shack. The river is handy, and you can get plenty of water. We'll take blankets along with us, and I'll figure out some way to keep you in grub. You can stay there a month—or longer."

Hope burned brightly on the face of the worn fugitive. The smile threw into relief his wan countenance, and Rodd suddenly was struck by the great change in Buckley. He wasn't so strong by far as Daniel Rodd had known him in prison.

"Maybe," the fugitive suggested, "it'll be safer to send one of the boys with me. Folks know you're an—an ex-convict, and I s'pose you attract attention. We might meet somebody on the road."

"I ain't afraid of that; but I'll send one of the boys. They know the woods better than me; they've played and hunted in 'em all their lives. I'll send one of the boys."

"You'll send the oldest boy, eh?"

"Yes, I'll send the oldest boy."

Daniel Rodd called his oldest son, and the young fellow responded with alacrity. The summons was not distasteful, for adventure lurked in the air, and neither he nor his brother had slept since Philip Buckley came to the house.

"Abram," said Daniel Rodd to his son, "Phil Buckley, my friend here, has run off from prison. We're goin' to help him get away, and to do that he'll have to put in some time at Robinson's shack. I'm goin' to let you take him there, and help him carry blankets and grub."

The father gazed thoughtfully into the eyes of the boy. "Abram," he added, "this man is the best friend I got, outside my family. He shared his grub and tobacco with me. He stole grub for me and give me tobacco when your mother was too poor to send me tobacco. This man was on to the ropes of that prison, and he knew how to get things that I couldn't get. He lied for me and took punishment for me, so that I wouldn't lose good time. Men that get to be friends in that place and in that way, never forget it. I hope you understand."

"I'll take care of him," Abram promised. "I'll put him in the shack and see that everything's all right."

Two hours later Philip Buckley, escaped lifer, was established with blankets and a supply of food in Robinson's shack. He and the boy brought along old papers and magazines, too, for time would hang heavily on the hands of the fugitive.

Abram Rodd got back to his home before daylight, and reported to his father that everything was safe and comfortable at the shack. That afternoon the youth trumped up an excuse to go to town.

He returned two hours later, and, though it passed unnoticed, he avoided his father. A half-hour after Abram got back, Daniel Rodd, at work near the house, saw a horse and buggy proceeding along the road.

Three men were in the buggy. As they drew nearer, Daniel Rodd recognized them as Sheriff Blackmore, Deputy Sheriff Dunning, and Deputy Sheriff Cunningham. They were driving toward Robinson's shack.

Now, it wasn't strange that the officers should be driving along that road. Neither did it follow that Robinson's shack was their destination, but Daniel Rodd instinctively felt that his friend, Philip Buckley, was in peril. He felt strangely uneasy, too, about the trip to town of his son.

But there was nothing that Daniel Rodd could do. He couldn't beat the officers to Robinson's shack, even if he were sure they were going there. And, above all things, the officers must not learn of the aid he had extended to the escaped life prisoner.

One man in the buggy was a friend of Daniel Rodd. That was Deputy Dunning. They had known each other many years. Dunning was one man who did all he could for Rodd during his trial and conviction. Dunning was a friend, but Daniel Rodd wasn't so sure about the others. They weren't enemies exactly; perhaps they were merely indifferent acquaintances.

There was nothing to do but wait and hope, and Daniel Rodd didn't have long to do either. Early that night the news spread about the countryside that Philip Buckley, a life prisoner who escaped from

State prison, had been captured in the lonely shack in Robinson's swamp. A day or two later the fugitive was again thrust behind the walls of the big jail.

The topic of Philip Buckley was discussed very little in the family of Daniel Rodd. The affair cast gloom over the household. The father and his son, Abram, began to watch each other furtively. Dark suspicion was in the father's heart, and fear in the son's.

Two weeks after Philip Buckley was captured Abram Rodd got a letter. From the envelope he extracted a check for two hundred dollars. The check bore the great seal of the State. He laid it before Daniel Rodd.

"What's that?" the father asked.

"That," replied the boy, "is the money we spent on the petition for Phil Buckley's pardon."

"Where 'd it come from?"

"I got it as a reward for the capture of Phil Buckley."

Daniel Rodd inquired in an icy voice: "Abram, did you squeal on Phil Buckley?"

"Yes," the boy answered frankly. His voice faltered and then grew strong. He went on steadily: "I went to town and told the officers where he was. I got Frank Dunning in on it, because I knew he was a friend and would see to it that I got the reward. I didn't tell the officers about Phil Buckley coming here. Nobody but

us knows that we helped him. I told them that he was on his way here, and that I met him in the road. Then I said I took him to the shack, where I knew he'd stay till I could get the officers. They ain't suspicious at all."

The father's face was stern, though tinged with sorrow. He announced, evenly: "Abram, you ain't no son of mine. Take that money and get out of the house."

The boy stepped to his mother's side and calmed her.

"Wait, father," said he, "till you hear it all. Phil Buckley asked me to do it. He said it was the only way he could pay the money back to you. When he first escaped he wanted to get as far away as he could, but suddenly he realized that he hadn't long to live. The prison doctor had told him that. The fear of capture tormented him so he couldn't sleep, and he decided to go back.

"Then he thought of you. He knew he couldn't live long, and was worried because you'd spent all that money on him. He figured out that scheme to pay you back—and there's the money.

"I didn't want to do it," Abram added, "but he wouldn't have it any other way; said he'd surrender to the officers if I didn't do what he wanted. He'd rather be in prison, sick like he is, than be out with the whole State chasing him. And he wanted to pay his debts."

## A WOMAN'S CHOICE

BY BLANCHE TRENNOR HEATH

**L**IFE brought two blossoms for her choosing—one  
A fair white lily fresh with morning dew;  
And one a rose nurtured in fuller sun,  
Fiery of scent and hue.

"The lily choose," said Life, "and like a dream  
Thy days shall glide beneath a peaceful spell;  
But choose the rose, thou shalt have pain supreme  
And bliss no tongue can tell!"

The lily or the rose? Ah, must she miss  
Passion or peace? Sighing, she raised her head,  
And took from Life love's flower of pain and bliss,  
"Give me the rose!" she said.

# Land of the Shadow People

by Charles B. Stilson

(A Sequel to "A Man Named Jones")

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### NEE-NAH MAKES A DISCOVERY.

**I**N the low doorway of a Huachipairi *malocca* built of sturdy palm-stems sat Kate Jones, shading her eyes with one hand from the rays of the setting sun and gazing at the varied scenes in the big compound, which the forest twilight was beginning to invade.

A few rods to her right, along the rim of shadow cast by the high, palisaded wall of the river side of the stockade, a group of pocket-edition warriors played at battle with tiny bows and arrows. Beyond them, wholly in the shadow, half a score of dogs crouched, mumbling and snarling over the *guiraba* bones which had been flung to them.

To the left and all along the southern wall firelights were beginning to twinkle before the other *maloccas*. Half-naked women flitted to and fro like shadows, preparing the evening meal. Painted warriors, demoniac in the half-light, but with very human appetites, began to lounge nearer the fires and hurry the cooks, after the fashion of hungry husbands all the world over.

Occasionally the small fighting men suspended their mimic warfare to roll curious, reverent eyes in the direction of the white chieftainess who sat so still, and whose beautiful, pale-skinned face and wondrous

golden hair, in which the dying sun kindled strange lights, stirred a wordless worship in their small, barbarian hearts. But none of them ventured nearer to their new deity.

At a distance of twenty feet from the door of the *malocca* a sentinel in full war-panoply paced regularly. It was death to approach the white woman whom the *curaca* had marked for his own; and the sentry was prepared to enforce the penalty.

It was evening of the eleventh day since Katherine had been brought senseless into the village and placed in the *malocca*. Day by day she had watched the gates of the stockade, and far into each night had listened to the thousand voices of the jungle, hoping for a sign from her friends—a voice, the distant echo of a shot—anything to bid her to hope on, for rescue was at hand.

None had come. She was beginning to despair.

Of the last moments of the barricade she had not been a witness. One frightful drama of savage hatred she had seen, and then had swooned. She had been treated kindly, even with deference, by her captors; but what her ultimate fate would be she could guess.

Why did not Bob come? That was the question in her heart as she sat on the threshold of the *malocca* and watched the

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sun sink behind the tree-tops through a sea of amethyst.

Presently a dingy old crone with withered breasts crept across the compound from one of the fires, and the sentinel allowed her to pass. She brought Kate's supper, a bowl of steaming and not unpleasant stew, a handful of bananas, and a gourd of water. The old woman grinned and squatted amicably on her hams to watch the prisoner eat.

Not long after she had gone a warrior approached the *tunduy*, which swung from a small tree near the center of the compound, and struck it a single light blow. That was the Huachipairi sunset gun, and curfew as well. The noise of playing children was hushed at once, and the youngsters headed each for the parental *malocca*. Even the dogs ceased their wrangling and slunk to their lairs.

Another sentry relieved Kate's guard for the night, and with him came the *curaca*—a tall, angular Indian of middle age. As he came near her, Kate nodded to him, which tickled him vastly. Taking up a position in front of her, he struck himself upon the breast, pointed skyward, and delivered a number of sonorous periods with all the unction of a Chautauqua speaker. At the conclusion of his oratory, Katherine bowed again, and he went away well pleased with himself.

It is doubtful if Kate would have been so courteous had she known that the *curaca* had come a-courting, and that his speech was the announcement that the next night would be that of the full moon, when he would take her to his *malocca* as his chief wife among a dozen.

Gradually the noises of the village died into silence. Flooded with moonlight, the compound lay like a picture done in silver and black by a master artist. In one spot only was there a motion to destroy the illusion: in front of the *malocca* where Kate slept on her bed of cane, the sentinel paced ceaselessly.

When he marched toward the river wall his shadow sprawled diagonally ahead of him athwart the short grass until it passed into the deeper shadow which lay like a velvet band at the foot of the wall. Each

time that happened he turned back toward the forest, and then the shadow followed him.

Many times, perhaps three hundred, the man had made his patrol, when a curious thing happened.

Had one with keen eyes been watching, he would have seen the sentry's shadow become suddenly darker as he turned from the wall. Moreover, it was not the precise shape it had been. It was as though the man who cast it had become wider and had developed a knoblike excrescence between his shoulders. Yet the observer would have seen no change in the man himself that would account for the shadow's strange actions.

At the end of his post the sentry paused, gazed toward the forest, and swung his shoulders to turn. But he had made his last earthly patrol.

Behind him the shadow writhed and grew taller. The warrior let fall his lance, sawed the air with clawing fingers, and crumpled soundlessly upon his back, his white eyeballs starting from their sockets, his mouth contorted in a ghastly grimace. Had a listener been very near, he might have heard a noise as of dry twigs crackling and a muffled death-rattle. The Huachipairi's limbs shuddered, stiffened, and relaxed.

*The shadow moved on and left him!*

Across the grass it flitted to the nearest *malocca*, obscured for an instant the square of moonlight in the open doorway, and disappeared within.

Incomprehensible shadow!

One witness there was to the latter phase of this mystery. An old woman—the same who had taken Kate her supper—had been restless. Unable to sleep, she had crept to sit in the doorway of her hut. She saw the sentinel fall, and she started up to go to him. But when she saw the shadow acting independently, it was too much for her. Down on her stomach she went, and pressed her withered face against her door-sill, praying to all the gods she knew, evil as well as good.

When she dared to look forth again, she saw the white woman walking in the moonlight toward the river wall, her own shadow

projected before her as it should have been, and another which was not hers stalking beside it.

It did not occur to the poor old dame to raise an alarm? What was the good of meddling with the great spirit of the river, which assuredly had invaded the village? She crawled back to bed and lay trembling so that the flooring shook.

Awakened by a cold touch upon her arm, Katherine started up. Steady green eyes were staring into hers, and she could see the dim outlines of a something which crouched in the darkness beside her bed. Light fingers swept her lips, and a warning hiss silenced the cry of alarm which arose in her throat. The creature tugged gently at her sleeve and pointed a shadowy arm toward the doorway.

"Who are you? What do you want?" Kate whispered.

Still pulling insistently at her dress, the odd presence moved in the direction of the door.

"*Nee-Nah!*" it hissed, and again, "*Nee-Nah!*"

That appeared to be the limit of its intelligible vocabulary; but it was enough. Without an instant's hesitation, Katherine arose and followed. She had seen *Nee-Nah* once, and she felt that she could trust the girl.

Jim Arnold had come to no harm at her hands. Anyway, anything was preferable to this gloomy savage village and the attentions of its painted chieftain.

She peered out to see what had become of the *Huachipairi* sentinel, and saw him lying on the sward, his limbs twisted and his head doubled under him. Terrible as was the sight, it reassured her and gave her fresh confidence in her guide.

Outside the door she turned to look at him. Though he walked within arm's length of her, such was the intangible quality of his skin and its strange resistance to the moonrays, that she saw him only as a moving outline, indefinite and elusive.

Into the shadow of the river wall he led her rapidly, and along it until they reached its intersection with the rear palisading of the stockade. In the angle of the walls he groped and found a dangling

rope of bark, which he tied under Kate's arms.

Monkeylike, he scrambled to the top of the wall, hauled her after him, and lowered her on its outer side. He jerked loose his rope, coiled it about him, and leaped after her. They started westward along the river bank.

Before they had taken twenty steps, two other forms arose in their path. A warm and comforting hand grasped Katherine's and drew her into a patch of moonlight. *Nee-Nah* stood before her.

"Ah-meer-e-can—he there?" questioned the girl eagerly, cutting short Katherine's thanks with an imperious wave of her hand and pointing at the dark loom of the stockade. "Where Ah-meer-e-can?"

"American?" repeated Kate perplexedly.

"Yes, yes! Ah-meer-e-can! You not understand? This his."

*Nee-Nah* drew from her girdle Arnold's automatic pistol.

Kate took the weapon wondering, saw Jim's name cut in its walnut stock, and believed that she understood.

"You mean Mr. Arnold," she answered. "No, he is not there. I thought he was with you."

*Nee-Nah's* face fell. She took back the pistol.

"I lose him," she replied laconically. "Where can be?"

Kate's information was a distinct facer for the girl, who had counted on Arnold being a prisoner among the *Huachipairis* after she had discovered the village. Fearful for his safety, she had decided not to wait for the arrival of the *Paititian* army, but to attempt his rescue herself.

*Hualla* had gone eastward to meet his countrymen, and so was unable to interfere with her. For a number of nights she had watched the village anxiously; and by day either *Rasco* or *Jaqui* had lurked in the neighborhood; but they had seen only Katherine.

Then *Nee-Nah* had resolved to release the white woman, though she felt small friendship for her, and learn from her, if possible, where Ah-meer-e-can was to be found.

For a few moments she considered the disappointing information, and then raised her head.

"Come," she said, and they resumed the march down the river.

"You Ah-meer-e-can's woman?" she asked abruptly, after trudging for a ways in silence. She turned and faced Kate.

"Why, no! Of course not!" ejaculated the astonished Katherine. "But my husband is his friend, and—"

"Husban'! What that?" interrupted Nee-Nah.

"My—why, my man," explained Katherine. "I have lost my man, too, in this horrible jungle, Nee-Nah! And I thought you could help me find him!"

Poor Kate, who had kept a stiff upper lip amid the perils of the barbarian village, now broke down and began to weep.

"Ah-meer-e-can got other womans, then?" persisted Nee-Nah; but she sidled nearer.

Kate shook her head. Next instant Nee-Nah's arms were around her neck, and the girl, too, was crying—all of which proceeding mystified Jaqui and Rasco exceedingly. After that there was no more coolness between Katherine and Nee-Nah.

"We find Ah-meer-e-can, and your man, too," announced the girl confidently a little later, when Kate had told her of the Antipa and Aguaruna settlements, of which she had not known before. "I go there," she declared.

And go she did, starting the next morning with Jaqui, after escorting Katherine to a safe distance from the Huachipairi village and leaving her on the other side of the river in charge of Rasco.

Before she went, she and Kate had a satisfying woman-talk about husbands and men in general, and Jim Arnold in particular.

"She was actually jealous of me," thought Katherine. "Who on earth can she be?" For Kate had found out no more about the girl than had Jim; though, being a woman, she had asked many more questions.

Not until daylight did the Huachipairi *curaca* discover the loss of his intended bride and the deaths of four of his guards-

men. It had been his custom to maintain a ring of pickets night and day in the forest outside of his stockade, to provide against surprises. He found that the ring had been broken in the night on its river side. Three of his sentries were brought in with broken necks—more evidence that Jaqui of the house of Hualla had passed, that way on his priestess's business.

Then a trembling old woman told her tale. Though the disappointed *curaca* brained the poor old dame with his war club, he believed her; and he was so scared in consequence that he made no attempt to follow the fugitive. He even withdrew his pickets, hoping further to appease the wrath of the powerful river god, who was manifestly displeased about something.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### JUSTICE SHUTS HER HAND.

**D**UE to a separation of the Aguaruna war party into two divisions, Arnold and Grimshaw did not meet in the course of the march to the river stronghold of the tribes; nor was either aware that the other had been captured.

Jim's wing of the party, after a journey of several days, reached the village late at night. He was lifted down from his mule, unbound and fed, after which a big warrior led him into a reasonably clean *malocca* and showed him to a comfortable cane bed. It looked particularly comfortable to Jim, who hadn't napped on anything better than a bush-heap for many weeks.

"If you're the bell-hop, old dear, and are waiting for a tip, just tell the clerk to charge it on the bill, 'cause I'm shy of change," he remarked to the fighting man who stood watching him by the firelight that flickered in from the compound, perhaps curious to see if white men took their rest like other mortals.

The savage grunted and went away.

"Hello, central—give me Morpheus," said Jim, testing the "spring" of the bed with his hand; and then, being a youth who was accustomed to take life's offerings much as they were handed out, he rolled

his sore bones onto it and promptly lost touch with the world for a matter of nine hours.

When he awoke, the sun was shining along the floor, and numerous small insects of the variety which adds zest to tropical life, and which even politeness cannot ignore, were exploring his person in search of pasturage. Jim raised himself on his elbow, scratching diligently.

"Hello!"

His ejaculation was called forth by the sight of ten plump, rosy toes, which pointed roofward from the foot of a bed on the opposite side of the *malocca*. The toes wriggled in reply, and from the perspective beyond them arose like the solar orb the big and beaming countenance of Grimshaw.

"Good morning, Mr. Arnold," he said with the most casual composure; "this is quite an unlooked-for pleasure."

Jim, unable to adjust his ideas to the situation, did not at once reply, and Zalmon went on: "By hikey! Mr. Arnold, I've been accused in my day of being a pirate; but allow me to say that it's you that looks the part just now. I'll lend you a razor after breakfast—unless you're cultivating 'em."

"Where—how in the world did you get here?" Arnold stammered. "Where is Jones? What's become of the rest of our crowd?"

He stared about the *malocca*, half expecting to see the faces of others of his late comrades.

Grimshaw shook his head and answered:

"To the best of my knowledge, there is left of that 'crowd' just the minimum necessary to start a Masonic lodge or constitute a riot—which is three—you and I and Tomás, who is somewhere about. The last I saw of the others, they were cuddled down in the grass back yonder like the babes in the woods, waiting for the birds to cover 'em."

"Wiped out—all of them!"

Zalmon nodded. He had made his announcement with a smile. He was smiling still.

Jim leaped up. His teeth and hands

were clenched so tightly that they threatened to pierce bones and flesh.

"Grimshaw, you're a damned rotter!" he said succinctly, when he could master his voice. He hid his face in his hands. When he lifted it, it was very white. "I heard that scrimmage; but I couldn't get into it. You *were* in it. What right have you got to be alive?"

"We seemed to have been caught in a right warm corner, where our brown brethren were settling their little differences," replied Grimshaw. "It appears that I had a friend in one camp. The chief of this outfit here had met me before and had taken a fancy to me. He obligingly took me out of the mess when it was beginning to get unpleasant. I'm very glad that he did. Some luck, eh?"

"Grimshaw," grated Arnold, striding across the room and standing over the fat man with working features, "shut up—and thank whatever god with whom you're on speaking terms that I don't kill you with my hands. If it hadn't been for you—oh, hell!"

He stamped savagely back to his bed and threw himself face downward upon it.

"Here comes our breakfast now," remarked Zalmon with an imperturbable grin, as a couple of native women entered the *malocca* bearing dishes.

Soon after they—or, rather, Zalmon, for Jim touched nothing—had breakfasted, the Aguaruna *curaca* paid them a call.

The tall *curaca* was afire with the zeal of the true collector. The acquisition of Grimshaw aroused in his breast the same sentiments a lapidary might experience should he purchase at auction a job lot of gems and find the Koh-i-noor among them; or a numismatist, should his grocer hand him an 1804 dollar in his change. He came to gloat over the good fortune which he foresaw would make him envied among men.

Two men accompanied him. One was Tomás the Aymara, walking sullenly, with his arms bound behind him; the other was a short, lean, bestial-looking, indescribably filthy old savage, whose greasy hair hung in strings about his face, and whose only claims to clothing were a girdle of mottled,

shiny material wound a number of times around his middle, and a necklace of similar stuff.

Both Tomás and the *curaca* walked well aloof from this individual, at which the white men did not wonder; for he brought into the *malocca* a stench beside which the odor of a tannery would have ranked as a sweet perfume.

"Red dog, stand near, and speak my words to the big white chief," the *curaca* ordered Tomás and seated himself on the foot of Zalmon's bed, with an expression almost of amiability on his cruel, intelligent face. The stinking old man squatted near the wall, peering through his hanging elf-locks at the white men with evil, blood-shot eyes, and crooning to himself in a monotonous, singsong undertone.

"In his land behind the mountains the white man is a great chieftain, is he not? Ask him," directed the *curaca*.

Tomás put the question in Spanish.

Grimshaw explained that he came from a land much farther than beyond the mountains, and that he was a great chief indeed, having been commander of many ships upon the sea.

"I know that my brother does not lie; for I have heard of the mighty lake of bitter water which flows into the sky, and in which the sun sleeps at night," answered the Aguaruna gravely. "I have heard, too, of the great birds which swim in that lake, carrying many men on their backs.

"So my brother has been the chief of these? I was sure that he was a great man. It is an honor to entertain him in a poor Aguaruna village. I shall not forget his greatness when I look upon his face in the days to come."

"What does he mean?" challenged Grimshaw. "He doesn't want to keep me here very long, does he? Tell him that I eat too much."

Tomás's sullen features were lighted by a saturnine grin.

"He means to keep you for always, Señor Grimshaw—and you will not eat," he replied. "Did I not tell the *señor* once before that these people take the heads of strangers?"

"That is nonsense, Tomás, my son.

Why, he has been very friendly. See him smile." And Zalmon returned with interest the amiable look of the *curaca*.

"He smiles because the *señor's* head pleases him so much," rejoined the inexorable Tomás. "The *señor* must know that he *has* a wonderful head."

"Ask him if that is what he wants," said Grimshaw shortly; for something in Tomás's manner had told him that the Aymara was not joking.

When the question was repeated to him, the *curaca* raised his eyebrows.

"Surely," he answered; "and I hope that my brother will give it to me willingly, and not make trouble about it. It was so that I might have his head that I bade my young men save my brother when the Huachipairi war-arrows flew thickly about him. It is better that his head should hang in the *malocca* of a wise Aguaruna, who knows how to appreciate its worth and to preserve its beauty, than in that of an ignorant Huachipairi, who is content with an empty and ugly skull only.

"That is why I am questioning my brother. Seeing that I am to have his head, it is right that I should know what is in it—and not even I can find that out when it hangs on the wall of my *malocca*."

Not without malice, Tomás translated. Grimshaw's cheeks lost just a shade of their rosiness, but a shade only; and he did not change countenance.

"Ask him when this little ceremony is coming—is going to take place," he directed.

"To-morrow—if it is a fine day," was the answer.

Zalmon arose and stepped to the door of the *malocca*, the cane flooring bending and creaking under the ponderous tread of his bare feet. Above the tree-tops which fringed the compound he studied the brazen sky. The others watched him curiously.

"Well, it will be a fine day," he said distinctly in English, and he returned composedly to his seat.

"I have heard that the white men do not believe that they die when they are dead, but that they go to a very pleasant place somewhere a great ways off," pursued

the *curaca*. "Does my brother believe so?"

"Why, I was raised a Christian, though I never worked very hard at it—tell him yes," replied Grimshaw.

"It is well," remarked the savage, nodding his head. "My brother will not regret then to leave this world, which is not always pleasant."

"I suppose that is pure philosophy," commented Grimshaw in an undertone; "though I cannot subscribe to it as wholeheartedly as perhaps I should."

Quite a number of other questions the *curaca* asked; and Zalmon's answers, and above all, the white man's demeanor, which was as unmoved as his own, confirmed the certainty of the chieftain that he had captured a prize.

"I know that my white brother is brave," said the *curaca* softly when he had done with his questions; "still I would try him a little, a very little—before tomorrow." He got up and stood to one side. "Come hither, Maqui!" he called. "It is now your turn to talk with the white man."

The squatting old man by the wall straightened up and approached Zalmon. As he came, his red eyes glistened through his hair and an inexpressibly hideous leer overspread his meager features. A leathery tongue crept out and moistened his thin lips.

For the space of a minute he stood motionless, looking into Grimshaw's eyes. Suddenly he fell into a crouching posture, and began making sinuous, graceful passes with his skinny paws through the air before Zalmon's face.

Arnold leaped up, choking a cry of horror.

Was it illusion, or was the old man's mottled girdle slowly unwinding of its own volition and thrusting into the air?

"*Cuidado—beware!*" exclaimed Tomás, himself shrinking; "they are *jararaca* snakes, *señor*, and deadly!"

Both girdle and necklace of the terrible old man had awakened to writhing, hissing life. Unfolding their glittering coils from his neck and waist, they swayed their lithe bodies forward, their flat, horrid heads,

with jeweled eyes and darting tongues, following the flexuous motions of those slowly twining arms, ever nearer and nearer the victim's face.

Grimshaw sat like a stone man. The smile on his face was that of a carven idol, fixed and awful. On his bald head small beads of perspiration started through the skin and clung like raindrops. Nearer swayed the tortile horrors.

"Are those—things—poisonous?" asked Arnold, his voice strained and unnatural.

"Do not doubt it, *señor*," the Aymara replied. "The old *diabolo* charms them, and they obey him."

"God!"

In a frenzy of unreasoning rage Jim bounded across the intervening space, and, with all the weight and power of his body behind it, drove his fist into the snake-charmer's ghastly face. Such was the force of that blow, sped by anger and loathing, that it lifted the savage clean off his feet and spun him, a grotesque bundle of flying arms and legs and writhing serpents, through the doorway of the *malocca*. He struck on the earth in the compound, and at once set up as fearsome and agonized a howling as ever came from a human throat.

Arnold shuddered. Craning his neck, he saw the unfortunate wretch running wildly in circles and tearing in agony at his face and breast.

"Good! Now his own snakes are biting him, *señor*. He will die very soon," said Tomás, and fell to laughing desperately at the stroke.

To their surprise, the *curaca* echoed the laughter. He ran to the doorway to watch the tortured gyrations of his loathsome coadjutor and to order warriors to come and kill the serpents.

Before the atrocious yells of the dying snake-charmer had ceased to ring through the compound, the chieftain addressed himself with animation to Jim.

"He says that he will make you his son, *señor*," translated Tomás, "and give you as many wives as you can find food for. He says his tribe has need for such blood as yours. I advise the *señor* to seem to fall in with the plan—and I shall tell

him that you wish me for your slave. While we stay alive there is always a chance to get away."

With a nod and a smile at the answer, and a last admiring glance at Grimshaw, who still sat in the same position, the *curaca* departed, taking Tomás with him.

"Thank you, Mr. Arnold," said Zalmon after a time. The fingers with which he began to roll a cigarette trembled slightly; but his voice was firm. "Yet you think me a damned rotter."

"Hell! I'd do as much for a dog," snapped Jim. "My God—to-morrow!" he groaned irrelevantly.

But the fat man *was* a brave man, and he did not cry small beer when he saw that his jig was up. He went out and took a turn in the compound, and later ate his dinner with unimpaired appetite. In the afternoon he scribbled for a time with an indelible pencil in the little alligator notebook in which he was wont to record his fishing exploits.

"Do you know, Mr. Arnold, this little run after emeralds was to have been my last venture," he said, closing the book and putting it away. "I had a dream—foolish, perhaps, but mine—of owning a little place out in southern California—three or four hundred acres in the foot-hills—nice grounds—little river with lots of fish—all that sort of thing.

"I'd have built a house, of course—rather sort of a castle I had in mind. I'd have had my friends there—I have friends, Mr. Arnold—and some nice young women about—pretty enough to cheer a man's declining years. Sounds like comic opera, doesn't it? Yes—that's what I'd have done." He stared out through the doorway and whistled softly a bar from "The Mikado."

Jim, clicking together in his pocket a brace of useless cartridge-clips, could think of little to say. The situation was too much for words. He might have felt more comfortable had it not been for the terrible calmness of Zalmon.

Thoroughly and irredeemably wicked as he knew the old reprobate to be, implacable, iron-willed and pitiless, he was displaying qualities which compelled respect.

And just at this juncture Jim would rather not have respected him.

Grimshaw ate as hearty a supper as he had a dinner, and slept like a child; while Jim scarcely touched food, and tossed sleeplessly nearly all the night through.

Arnold made up his mind that, heartily as he despised Zalmon, he could not see him dragged out of there to his death without putting up a fight, which very probably would send him along the same route. Perhaps the *curaca* foresaw some such decision.

At any rate, two warriors entered the *malocca* soundlessly in the early hours of the morning, seized Jim, who had begun to doze, and bound him tightly with *sipos*. When he found that he could not break them, he turned his face to the wall, and tears came into his eyes, for which he was not ashamed.

The sun came up big and bright, and it was a fine day. And presently the *curaca* came with Tomás to say that the tribesmen were waiting.

Zalmon ate his breakfast calmly, deliberately rolled and smoked a cigarette, and then stepped over to Arnold and dropped the little alligator book and another small packet on the bed.

"I've two notions," he said. "One is that you will come through this affair all right; and the other is that Mr. Jones isn't dead, and will pull through, too. He is a lucky man.

"If either of you do, there is information in the book which will be useful. In the case there is my razor. You'll need it. S'pose that I might have used it myself in the night and fooled our friend the *curaca* here; but that would have been playing it rather low down on him after all the pains he's taken. Besides, he reminded me yesterday that I was raised a Methodist; and they don't approve of such things. Good-by, Mr. Arnold."

"Good-by, Grimshaw." It was Jim's voice that shook, and he could say no more. Again the tears rushed into his eyes.

Grimshaw bent over, found his bound hands, and pressed them. Then he went out with a steady step, and smiling.

Arnold ground his face into the woven canes of the bed, and tried not to think or hear.

Tomás, who had been left with him, lounged in the doorway and watched the proceedings in the compound.

Many minutes passed; then there arose a great howling from the Aguarunas.

"*Santos Dios!*" exclaimed the Aymara. "Señor Grimshaw may have been a bad man—but he was a *man!*"

Arnold noted the past tense. "Is it over with, Tomás?" he asked.

"Yes, *señor*; he is dead. I think they are going to eat him now."

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LOVE ENTERS IN.

FROM the day of Zalmon's passing, both Arnold and the Aymara were allowed their liberty, with restrictions. They were no longer bound; and they had the run of the compound, with the understanding that their lives would repay any attempt at escape.

Of this latter there seemed small chance. The *curaca* realized the value of sharp discipline; and his sentries were many and as vigilant as fear for their skins could make them. Everywhere the two captives wandered, keen black eyes were upon them, by night and by day. Arnold saw that an evasion, if possible at all, would have to be a matter of time.

"And we must not make a mistake, *señor*," said Tomás. "I like not the eyes of this *curaca*. What he says, that will he do."

In the mean time the chieftain advised Jim to think over the proposition of adoption and marriage into the tribe. But, though he had set his heart on it, the wily savage did not urge the white man. His method of gaining his end, to his mind, was much more subtle. He made his intentions public, and they at once became the talk of the town.

Matchmaking was as popular a sport among the Aguaruna females as it is with their distant cousins in Fifth Avenue. Among the maidens of the village, from

whom Jim had been assured he might have his pick, there was a pleasurable flutter of expectation every time he walked abroad. With no less a thrill the matrons placed all the *élite* on parade where he could not fail to see them. Did he so much as look slantwise at a dusky damsel, she became the envied of her comrades, and all of the members of her family put on outrageous airs in consequence.

Naturally these things engendered jealousies. To tell all the truth, Jim was the innocent cause of a number of lively hair-pulling matches in secluded spots behind the *maloccas*, and of one near riot in the open compound—all because of his careless and uneven distribution of his smiles.

Be it remarked in passing that Jim had made good use of Grimshaw's razor; and his frank, rather quizzical countenance and fair skin made him seem a young god to these forest belles. His reputation, too, was high because of his destruction of the dreaded witch-doctor Maqui.

One there was among the fair eligibles who was discontent to wait the slow process of selection, but who boldly flung herself at the handsome stranger's head. Here began to show the fine Italian hand of the *curaca*; for the aspiring damsel was his sixteen-year-old daughter, a girl of undeniable beauty, despite her brown skin, though with a rather too strong suggestion of her father in her cruel, imperious eyes.

From the first this Lanao set her cap—figurative, of course: her glossy locks never had known such restraint—for Jim. She was resolved that when it came to choosing, she would be the first choice, and would rule the white chief's prospective household by threefold right of priority, birth, and temper—and of the last she had plenty.

In her ambitions Lanao had the tacit support of her powerful father, who was delighted with her choice. So she laid open siege to Jim's heart; and so fiercely did she resent all rivalry—on occasions with a club—that the other lovelorn lasses sighingly yielded her the inside track, and contented themselves with a close competition for "place."

As the social conventions of the Aguar-

unas require little more than the transfer of a maid from her parents' *malocca* to that of her swain to establish a marriage, poor Jim found himself hard put to it to remain a bachelor. For Lanao paid him calls on every possible pretext, fairly haunting the neighborhood of his domicile and several times showed an inclination to share it with him after "curfew" which required the most tactful kind of hinting to discourage.

Tomás found all this amusing enough, if Jim did not. The big Aymara, squatting on the *malocca* floor and pulling solemnly at his long pigtail, oftentimes would wink slyly as he translated Lanao's fervid protestations, which were not without their poetry, witness a sample:

"Tell my white lord that Lanao loves him as the flame-vine loves the *sapucaya* tree (only think of it *señor*—sometimes the vine strangles the tree); that his face is bright to Lanao, as is the sun's to the weeping forest when he shines forth again after the great rains."

But Tomás when he did his winking was mighty careful to see that Lanao's great black eyes were fixed upon her sun-god's face. He had a well-founded suspicion that the girl, had she comprehended his pleasantries, would have slit his throat with as little compunction as she would have peeled a plantain, even though it had cost her the services of such an able interpreter.

Jim's continence was incomprehensible to Tomás, who made it no secret that he would have been glad to have the white man's chances. In fact, Tomás looked upon Jim's continued refusal to accept the offered charms as a danger, seeing that both their lives might well be forfeit to it. So, with no small stake in the game, he ventured to advise, even to urge.

"The girl is comely, *señor*, and, *Madre de Dios!* she is more than willing. Why not take her? It will make matters easier all around. So long as you remain unwed, just so long will this accursed *curaca* suspect that we mean to give him the slip.

"What matter about the girl, *señor*? She is only a *Chuncho*. *Carramba!* myself, I would wed with a dozen such, and

gladly, and yet leave them all without a thought when the good time should come. Take her, *señor*. Let me tell her to fetch her beads and mats, and have done with all this talking of rains and suns and flame-vines."

But Arnold's code forbade that he trifle with the affections of even a *Chuncho* maid. No matter where it was performed, or how unorthodox, a marriage was to him a till-death-do-us-part affair.

Besides, there was Nee-Nah. The influence of that beautiful anomaly was too fresh and pure in his heart to allow him to enter into a *liaison* with Lanao, even had he been less scrupulous than he was.

"It's no use, Tomás, old *hombre*," he said. "Can't do it. If I do, here we stay for good and all; and that doesn't appeal to either of us. But if you can persuade the lady to take a tender interest in your person, and leave me in peace, I'll buy you the best rifle outfit in Huarez, if ever we make the old burg again."

Where was Nee-Nah? Gone on to her hidden city of marvels, Jim supposed, in company with the men who, well as he had known them, always seemed more a part of a weird dream than of reality.

Could Zalmon have been right about Jones? If so, where was he? What had been the fate of Katherine and the Martian and little Don Castor Oil? What was his (Jim's) future to be, should he by chance escape from his present predicament?

There could be only one answer to that question: he would take up the search for the lost Paititi, and would find it and its priestess, or he would grow old and die in the searching. Ah, if he had not lost Nee-Nah! Just a few more weeks, perhaps days, and he was sure that she would have turned to him.

So his vagrant thoughts were straying—he was sitting one moonlight night in the doorway of his *malocca*—when Nee-Nah came to him.

Two hours before, the life of the village had murmured into silence. Vacant-eyed, Jim was gazing over the big, circular patch of sanded ground which lay between the *maloccas* and the gate, and which served

the villagers as a dance-ground, when the girl leaped thoughtful-like into his vision, flashing from nowhere, it seemed, and came like a night-breeze across that silvered carpet, her arms tossing, her glorious hair flying.

And for a thought indeed Arnold took her in the brief instant before he heard the scudding of her little feet upon the hard sand, the clash of her bracelets, her panting breath, and then a shrill, glad cry with a note of terror in it:

"Ah-meer-e-can!"

Even in that moment of confusion Jim saw and wondered at an indefinite shape which raced shadowlike beside her.

He snapped to his feet, his cry of surprise turning to alarm and warning. For the voice of Nee-Nah was echoed by a savage yell; and out of the dusk and into the moonlight behind her bounded two dark figures of Aguaruna sentinels with lifted spears.

But the girl was fleet as an antelope. Forty feet ahead of her nearest pursuer she crossed the threshold of Jim's *malocca*. Almost invisible, except for the glint of light on the copper blade of his ax, Jaqui of the house of Hualla entered with her.

As they darted past him, Jim saw the foremost savage pause with squared shoulders and his arm go up and back. Jim groaned. Weaponless as he was, he filled the doorway with his body to shield the girl he loved. His life had surely been spilt by the flying danger which came hissing toward him, but that haste and excitement spoiled the spearman's aim.

A lance of *pasuba* palm, its point fire-tempered to the hardness of steel, missed the white man's neck by narrow inches and stuck quivering between the canes of the *malocca* wall at the side of the doorway. Uttering another fiendish yell, the Aguaruna caught his stone-tipped club from his girdle and came charging on. Again his impetuosity saved Arnold; the second sentinel not daring to cast his lance for fear of hitting his comrade.

Jim tore the spear from the wall and received the daring warrior with a thrust so fierce that its needle-point stood out behind his shoulders. The falling body

wrenched the haft away, and once more Jim stood weaponless.

The other sentry, undismayed by the fate of the first, bounded across the grass, screeching as he came. Something was poked under Arnold's armpit from behind.

"Ah-meer-e-can! Make thunder-fire! Quick!"

Moonlight gleamed coldly on the blue steel barrel of Jim's own automatic in Nee-Nah's small brown hand. With a shout of triumph he seized and swung it forward and death leaped forth from its spitting fire. Ten feet away from the doorway the Aguaruna met the steel messenger, flung his arms wide as if to embrace it, and pitched heavily upon his face.

"Bueno! the *señor* has a gun!" growled the deep voice of Tomás in Jim's ear. "Now will there be fighting. Harken to the *diabolos* howl."

Near the gate sentries were rushing to and fro, shouting excitedly to know what had happened. Every *malocca* in the big compound was vomiting bewildered fighting men.

"Come on, you devils!" said Jim grimly, patting the extra cartridge-clips in his pocket. "Twenty-two of you will never eat monkey meat again if this moonlight holds out."

"But who are these others who have come, *señor*?" Tomás asked. "Almost had I fallen upon them, waking suddenly from my sleep and finding them here. Then I saw the *señor* and heard him shoot, and I knew that they must be friends."

At that moment Jaqui approached the doorway, and the Aymara glimpsed him.

"*Santos Dios!* another *momia*—if it is not the same one!" Tomás shrank away; and despite Arnold's explanation, he took care to give the Paititian a wide berth. Catching sight of Nee-Nah, the big Indian muttered: "It is plain to see why the young *señor* was so cold to Lanao."

While Jim watched the compound with pistol ready, Tomás fetched the beds from the interior of the *malocca* and built a barricade across the doorway. Before he closed it, he ran out and took the weapons from the slain men. Their two war-clubs he lashed together with *sipos* so as to

make a weapon suitable to his great strength of arm. That done to his satisfaction, he joined Jim.

"I hope that this *momia* can fight," he said to himself; and such was the mixture of childlike superstition with leonine bravery in the heart of Tomás that, though he made ready to face his wild foemen with nothing better than a club in his hands, he shivered and chose the far side of the entrance opposite where Jaqui crouched with his ax.

In the shadow of the little barricade Nee-Nah crept to Arnold's side. To his unutterable joy and thankfulness, she told him of the rescue of Katherine Jones from the Huachipairi village.

"But why did *you* come in here, Nee-Nah?" he asked. "Why didn't you let Jaqui come alone? We could have made a dash for it."

"Come for you, Ah-meer-e-can," was her simple reply. "Nee-Nah see you sit here so sad in light of moon. No could stay away."

What the girl had learned from Katherine had borne its fruit. There was a something in her tones which Jim never had heard there before, something which thrilled his heart and gave him new hopes and courage. He groped out in the darkness and found her hand; and it did not flee his clasp.

"I love you, Nee-Nah! Can you love me, dear?"

"'Bout love, don't know. Know Nee-Nah no can live more unless see you, Ah-meer-e-can. What you do to poor Nee-Nah?" A little sob attested the sincerity of her words.

"Well, if that ain't love, it's something better. It's just the way I feel, too, Nee-Nah—only I've felt it longer."

He gathered the girl to him, and she no longer resisted the pleading of his lips.

"Oh, Nee-Nah so glad—so glad!" she whispered. Her head lay on his shoulder. Out there in the shadows savage hearts might plot the lovers' hideous death; but they could not mar the happiness of that first long embrace.

Among the panic-stricken Aguarunas the iron discipline of the *curaca* soon made

itself felt. The howling chorus was quieted, and the chief was able to get a tolerably clear idea of what had caused the alarm. Another of his sentries had seen Nee-Nah make her dash from the wall, where she had been discovered by the pair who had pursued her to their deaths.

This man stood forth and told of a wild white maiden who had flown over the wall like a bird. He further swore that she was accompanied by a ghost. He had seen it running beside her, he declared, and the moonlight shone through its ribs.

Instant rebuke descended upon the guardsman from the hard-headed *curaca*, who himself never had seen a ghost and did not believe in them. He remembered at once the white girl and men who had fled from him on the day of the big jungle battle, and who had slain his pursuing warriors. So much the better if she were in his compound.

"We will go and talk to these ghosts," he said; and like a good general, he sternly ordered his sentinels back to their positions.

Presently the dark space between two of the *maloccas* opposite the one which Jim occupied was choked with fighting men. Tomás saw them.

"If this is to be our last fight, *señor*, it shall at the least be a good one," he said. "Shoot the *curaca* if you can, *señor*."

Hardly had the words left the Aymara's lips when the tall form of the *curaca* advanced into the light with lifted hands.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### JIM HOLDS HIS FORT.

"SHOOT, *señor*, shoot!" exclaimed Tomás, and groaned disgustedly at Jim's answer that he could not harm a man who was asking a truce. Fearlessly the *curaca* walked half the distance which separated him from the *malocca*, then halted and raised his voice:

"Red dog"—his usual appellation for the Aymara—"asks my white son why it is that he slays his Aguaruna brothers by night, and who is the white woman who has entered his *malocca*."

"Tell him that last is none of his damned business," said Jim nervously; "and as for the rest of it, it is likely that considerable more of my 'Aguaruna brothers' will die—unless he will consent to let us go out of here with the rising of the sun to-morrow."

"If he does that, then he will ambush us and slay us before we have gone a league in the jungle," protested Tomás. "It is best to die here, *señor*, where we can be sure of killing more of them."

Jim insisted that the Aymara translate his demand. It was a slender chance enough, he knew; but it was the only one. At first, the *curaca* was minded to comply, viewing the matter exactly as Tomás had suggested. On second thought, he began to fear outside collusion.

"Say to my son," he answered, "that the heart of his red father is heavy because of the young men he has slain, and because he is not content to dwell in peace with his brothers. Say to him further that such is the love his red father bears him, that if he will come forth and make no more trouble, and will give up the white woman and the other who entered with her, he shall still be forgiven. But if he shall refuse to do that, then my young men will come and take him, and he shall surely die as the fat white man died."

"Ask him if he will let the white woman go again to the jungle, if I will give up," responded Arnold. Once beyond the walls, he knew that Nee-Nah could take care of herself; and he was willing to make any sacrifice that would insure her safety.

"No," was the decided reply of the *curaca*. "It is not for my son to tell his red father what he shall do. I have seen the white girl before. She is fair to look upon. Is not my son content that I give him my own daughter for a wife? The white girl shall go to my *malocca*. None of my wives are so fair."

"Tell him, Tomás, that if he doesn't get himself out of my sight in about three wags of a very small monkey's tail, I'll let the moon shine through him!" exclaimed Jim, more nervously than ever and through set teeth. Across the barricade he leveled the automatic and brought it to bear

steadily on the broad chest of the chieftain.

Tomás's translation, embellished by one or two little inventions of his own, was greeted by a howl of fury from the Aguarunas. With an ironic wave of his hand, the *curaca* stalked majestically back into the shadow. He had no sooner disappeared than his warriors broke cover and charged the *malocca*.

"Lord help us! I did the best I could," said Jim, seeing them start. "Never was much of a diplomat, anyhow." He kissed Nee-Nah and put her to one side in the shelter of the wall.

The range was short, and the light was good. Resting his pistol-arm on one of the upturned beds, Jim made every bullet count—some of them double, as the yelling crowd came nearer. When the rush broke on the front of the *malocca*, eight of the *curaca's* fighting men had shouted their last war-cry, and Jim was sliding the second clip into his automatic.

Tomás heaved himself up, swinging his formidable double club with both hands.

"Save your bullets, *señor*!" he grunted. "Let the *momia* and I crack the skulls of these eager dogs."

*Crash!* the club fell, and the skull of the first warrior who reached the doorway was cracked indeed. A second man fell back screaming, his collar-bone cloven through by Jaqui's ax.

Then the fighting became so close and desperate that wounded and dying men found no room in which to fall, but were upborne and thrust forward by the weight of their comrades pressing from behind. The cane walls about the doorway cracked and bulged under the pressure; but they held. The ax and club swung ceaselessly. Jim's pistol spat again.

Out of the ruck of swarming, struggling men one warrior, greatly daring, scrambled onto the shoulders of his fellows and leaped high over their heads at the arch of the doorway. Tomás saw him coming, and, letting fall his club, he caught the flying figure by the wrist and waist-cloth. With a heave of his magnificent shoulders, the giant Aymara pitched the man back, clear of the crowd, a sheer toss of

fifteen feet, to fall on his head with a broken neck on the hard turf of the compound.

Arnold's pistol was struck from his hand by the glancing blow of a club. Groping to recover it, his fingers encountered the long, straight haft of a *pasuba* spear. He seized it and leaped up, striking and thrusting as madly as any savage of them all.

Once a brown face, living or dead he knew not, was projected at him across the barricade, and he crushed its jaw with a blow of his fist, nor felt the pain of his bruised knuckles until long afterward.

"They give, *señor!* *Santos Dios!* they give!" shouted Tomás, smiting so fast and furious that it seemed the club, tough as it was, must splinter in his powerful hands. He had forgotten his fear of the Paititian, and Jaqui fought shoulder to shoulder with him now, hissing like an aroused serpent, and hardly less deadly. The Aguarunas fell back. Save for the dead man who hung across the barricade, the doorway was clear.

From his post of observation in the shadows the *curaca* called his warriors back. He found his method of attack proving too costly. Nineteen of his hardiest fighting men were down, and none had passed that grim, dark doorway, where Death himself seemed to be keeping ward. The chief understood little about firearms. For aught he knew, the devilish instrument which was now spitting again in the hands of the white man was inexhaustible. Another way must be found to silence it.

Gashed and breathless, but wildly exultant, Tomás wiped the blood from his face and eyes and gasped bitter taunts at the backs of the retreating foe. The cotton shirt had been torn from the Aymara's body, baring the herculean muscles which had wrought such terrible havoc in the *mêlée*, and his blood was oozing from a dozen spear-cuts; but his life was whole within him still, and his splendid courage rose superior to the death which he believed was near.

"*Madre de Dios, señor,*" he said, leaning on his club and counting the slain; "if we die to-night, and I think we shall, it is something to have lived for such fight-

ing. Many more will die before we are done. Well will we revenge the deaths of the little master and your friends, and the bad man who was so brave.

"Aye, kiss your loved one, *señor*, and be not ashamed. This night you fight for her as God lets few men fight; and kisses are all the sweeter when death is standing by: to count them."

"What big man say, Ah-meer-e-can?" asked Nee-Nah, clinging to Jim's arms with trembling fingers.

He told her. "And I am afraid that he is right, sweetheart," he said, sorrow for her laying hold of his throat. "Little girl, little girl, why didn't you keep out of this!"

She raised a hand to pat his lips. "Nee-Nah very glad die with you, Ah-meer-e-can," she whispered. "Only sorry if you sorry."

"Hello, *señor!* here comes one who is mad!" cried Tomás, raising his club. Jim leaned to look out of the doorway.

Across the grass and over the bodies of the dead warriors a lithe brown figure came leaping, brandishing a spear and screaming as it came, while a chorus of wild cries rang behind it.

Somehow, from word of woman or warrior, it had come to the ears of Lanao that a white girl was in the *malocca* with Arnold. While the other Aguaruna women cowered moaning in their homes, quaking at sound of the white warrior's thunder, the girl, her wild heart swollen by an agony of jealousy that put her above all fear, rushed out to watch the battle.

Each fresh memory of the young white man's repulses fanned the flame within her. So it was because of this that Lanao had been spurned! Let her once lay her hands on this pale rival, and she should wish that she never had been born!

So Lanao swore as she ran; for she had much of her father's spirit and little of his caution. She reached the *curaca's* side as his battered tribesmen trooped about him, glad of his order of retreat. At sight of them, and knowledge that her rival was still unharmed, perhaps at that moment in the arms of her lover, Lanao went quite mad.

Before a brain could divine her purpose or a hand be lifted to detain her, she had snatched a spear from a warrior and launched herself on her errand of vengeance. Vainly her father shouted to stop her. Her feet were like the wind.

Almost had she rushed headlong upon death. It was not until she clambered shrieking upon the barricade that Jim recognized her and struck aside the Aymara's swinging club. His forbearance nearly cost him dear.

A blow from the infuriated girl's lance gashed his forehead, and a second thrust, sped by bitter hatred, passed through Nee-Nah's gown. Then Tomás seized Lanao from behind and overpowered her.

"Ha, señor, this is good!" he ejaculated, restraining the girl with difficulty, for she fought him like a tiger cat. "We hold the *curaca's* daughter. Now he will hardly try to burn our house with fire, as I feared that he might do."

Tomás tied the hostage with *sipos* and laid her on the floor, where she cursed them all to the farthest generation of their ancestors in a way which would have been horrible to hear, could any but Tomás have understood it.

This additional complication added to the difficulties which Jim's absurdly small fortress presented to the *curaca*. But in spite of the presence of his daughter in the *malocca* and her possible danger, the chief-tain disdained further parley. He had spoken his word.

Strategy and stealth must prevail where open force had proved too expensive. Ostentatiously he drew his fighting men away, and for a time there was comparative quiet in the compound.

"Hist, señor!" Tomás whispered after a period of tense watching and waiting, "I think they are cutting the back wall."

While Jaqui guarded the door, Jim and the Indian crept silently to the rear of the hut and groped along its wall. In one spot they found the canes bulging, and Jim thought he heard the rasp of a blade on the tough stems. He leveled his pistol at the suspected spot and pressed the trigger. A scream of mortal anguish and the padding of hurrying feet followed the report.

Not long afterward the defenders discovered that some one had crawled under the *malocca* and was working at the flooring. Again the automatic barked in the darkness. A deep groan answered it.

He who had burrowed molelike beneath their feet died a mole's death in his burrow. That ended the attempts upon the walls. The *curaca* decided to wait and let hunger and thirst fight against his warlike prisoners. But that test was spared them.

Toward three o'clock in the morning the entire village was aroused anew by the furious thudding of the *tundays* down the river.

"It is a call for aid, señor," said Tomás, who was watching at the door. "The *curaca* gathers his warriors to go. What can be—"

The Aymara's speculation was drowned by the booming of the big drum in the compound. Its sonorous notes were still vibrating when the sentinels came hurrying in from the forest, raising a wild alarm.

But the sound which brought Jim Arnold to his feet with a glad shout and lighted his eyes and heart with hope, was a vengeful spitting of hidden rifles as the sentries came tumbling over the wall.

At the gates of the stockade flared a light that was brighter than the moonshine.

"*Hola*, Tomás, my son, are you there within?" boomed a great voice from the forest.

"Castor Oil! by all that's good and holy!" Jim leaped for the doorway.

"If that is not the little master, it is his ghost come from heaven to save us!" cried Tomás, and he lifted his voice in answer:

"Master, I am here—and the Señor Arnold with me. *Cuidado*, master! The Aguaruna dogs gather before their gates."

It was no ghost that had hailed the Aymara. The fever had left Don Castro, and Icorro at last had taken to the war trail.

Out of the gloom of the jungle rose a yell of exultation from two hundred Antipa throats as the flames leaped over the gateway. When fire had cleared the way, there would be fighting.

"Jones! Bob Jones! Are you alive?" sung out Arnold, in his excitement leaping up and down like a child.

"Here, Jim—and coming," was the answer, followed by an Irish yell from King Kelly and the wailing war-cry of Nambe.

With a whoop, Jim caught up the bewildered Nee-Nah, kissed her for at least the three hundredth time, and whirled her madly around the *malocca*.

"They're alive! They're all alive! They've come at last, sweetheart! Now you will see some Yankee fighting!"

Incautiously he hung himself over the barricade and hurled insults at the *curaca* and encouragement to his friends. Above all the clamor at the contested gates he made his young voice heard:

"Bob, Katherine is safe! Nee-Nah saved her! Nee-Nah is here with me!"

Those words rolled back a weight from Jones's heart which seemed to have lain there for ages.

"Is Kate in there?" he called.

"No, old man; she's safe in the woods somewhere! I'm standing siege in one of their dirty huts!"

Heedless of his limited supply of ammunition, Jim opened fire on the rear of the Aguarunas; but the range was so long that he did them little damage.

In front of his blazing gateway the *curaca* marshaled his warriors to make a grim fight of it. He knew now with whom he had to deal, and he knew their strength. He would give these Antipas a lesson, despite their white allies. But he was sorely puzzled to know what had befallen at his lower towns. His big drum was calling for aid now, instead of promising it—and there was no answer from below.

Coincidence had brought two forces into the field that night.

In an interval in the hellish din at the gateway the whistle of a parrot sounded shrill and clear from the eastern forest. Three times it was repeated.

From the darkness at Arnold's elbow arose the piercing reply of Jaqui. It was the turn of Nee-Nah to exult.

"We shall not die this night, Ah-meer-e-can!" she cried. "Hualla has come!"

Arrived from Paititi with a strong force of fighting men, Isako had met his uncle. They learned from Rasco that the lie which Isako had told in Paititi was like to be a

bitter truth, and their dear priestess indeed in the hands of the barbarians.

So Hualla had taken command and come on through the forest like a whirlwind. Village after village of the Aguarunas he attacked and took, leaving at each a force to destroy it utterly. Now he had reached the last stronghold and found his signal answered.

Just as the great gates crashed down, and Antipa met Aguaruna in a fierce death-struggle among the blazing ruins, Hualla poured his shadowy platoons over the eastern wall.

On they came, phalanx after phalanx of naked axmen with strange, emotionless faces and skins so attuned to the moonlight that as they formed and charged they seemed like a cloud of mist sweeping across the silvered sand of the dance-ground.

"*Santos Dios!*" breathed Tomás, as he saw them go past him. "The ghosts of all the Gentiles have come out of hell to fight for us!"

Savages, armed with the weapons of savages, no matter how valiant, could not withstand the onset of fighting men such as the Paititians, who, in their intangible armor of semi-invisibility, engulfed their foemen in a vapor of death, where warriors fell like corn under the copper axes and were unable to see how to parry or where to strike.

Trapped front and rear, there in his gateway the Aguaruna chieftain died, and with him died most of his bravest tribesmen. Such of the villagers as were able to escape from the compound crept away through the forest and joined the refugees from the other towns in headlong flight for their native lands along the Rio Maranon.

Once more there was "peace" on Icorro's river.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### THE TWO QUESTIONS.

TROPICAL dawn with its gold and purple and blue stole out of the east and looked down on two camps after the battle was done.

Not far from the smoking ruins of the Aguaruna wall Jones's party and its Antipa

allies had pitched their quarters. For the survivors of the little caravan which had faced so many perils it was a time of glad reunions. No one slept, and no one thought of sleep. Katherine Jones had been brought in by the faithful Rasco and returned to her husband; and there had followed an interchange of greetings as of persons risen from the grave itself.

Farther along the river-bank lay the bivouac of Hualla, where three hundred men of Paititi gathered around their morning fires, the hissing of their camp gossip sounding like the wind among dead leaves. From hand to hand and from fire to fire there circulated that morning an object which one of their number had taken from an *Aguaruna malocca*, and which brought a flash of surprise to even their expressionless faces.

Nee-Nah was with Arnold among his friends. In the heart of each was a question, the answer to which each feared:

"Will she stay?"

"Will he go with me?"

But for a time those questions were not put, and all talked busily of other matters.

Jim's story of the death of Grimshaw brought a startled look into the faces of Bob and Katherine Jones. What of the lost Bobby? If the best police authorities in the world had failed to find the kidnaped child, how was it to be done now that Grimshaw was gone? Would not the custodians of the lad suspect foul play in the demise of Zalmon, and take extreme measures accordingly?

Serious as they were, those questions were answered more easily than those which beset Jim and Nee-Nah. As they passed through the minds of the worried parents—the end of Grimshaw was too recent and too awful to permit their speaking them aloud—Arnold delved in his pocket and produced the little alligator note-book.

"It's a strange thing, Bob; but before he went, Grimshaw expressed the belief that somehow you would pull through. He said that if you should, this book would be useful to you; but if you shouldn't, I was to use it. I sort of played his hunch on you, and I haven't looked in it."

Beyond many pages devoted to an enumeration of fishing trophies and miscel-

laneous memoranda, Jones found the following entry in Zalmon's flowing, even hand:

MR. ROBERT L. JONES:

If this writing comes to your hand, you will have learned the circumstances under which it is written. Why do I write it at all? Conscience? No. A young friend of yours to-day risked his life to spare me a bit of mental discomfort. I guess you will have to thank him. I never could endure snakes.

Thus far I never have found cause to regret anything which I have done. I have lived for myself, and I have found that course entirely agreeable. Now I am going to find out whether there is to be any regret hereafter. But I stray from the point.

Your son is in the care of Spanish Luiz at the home of my mother. The place is called "The Pines," and it is near the north end of the Isle au Haut, twenty-five miles off the coast of the State of Maine. You will have to be circum-spect; for Luis is faithful and quick to act. Better go yourself. The police might bungle.

My mother, who is very old now, and stone-deaf, knows nothing of the antecedents of the boy. To her he is only a trust from me; and she never has had reason to consider me otherwise than a model son. By the way, her name is not Grimshaw, but Holcomb.

ZALMON (GRIMSHAW) HOLCOMB.

Jones read the document twice, the second time aloud.

"Well," he remarked when the flurry of comment around the breakfast camp-fire had subsided, "I guess that takes the point entirely out of this pleasure jaunt so far as the firm of Jones & Jones is concerned, doesn't it, Kate?"

"If you mean the emeralds, Bob, it does," answered Katherine decidedly. "I never want to see one of them. They would have cost too much. Let us hurry home and get Bobby. Poor little dear; he is still in danger; and I never shall have a night of peaceful sleep until we have him safe again."

"It is moved, seconded and carried, then, that the Jones hunt for the Cooper emeralds is off, with a capital O," Jones resumed; "unless you want to go to it, Jim." He turned a smiling face toward Arnold, who was squeezing Nee-Nah's hand behind Katherine's back. Jones closed an eye slowly.

"Nix! I have found my emerald," was Jim's unblushing reply. "The mine is there, though. Old Hualla knows about it.

Nee-Nah asked him. He says the folks we call the Incas used to work it; and the necklace which Nee-Nah wears came from the tomb of one of their princesses many years ago." Jim again became absorbed in his more than pleasant occupation.

Don Castro, who had started at the first words of the young man's response, bent an odd gaze upon him, and pulled reflectively at his big mustache.

"I know that Kelly here has enough to keep him out of the poorhouse," said Jones. "You don't want 'em, do you, Martian?"

Kelly shook his red head slowly. "No, Robert, I do not. I feel as Mrs. Jones does. Let us turn back at once and get the little Robert. He is worth all the emeralds in the world."

Jones took from his pocketbook the faded slip of paper which had cost so many heart-aches and the lives of so many brave men. "I am putting it in the hands of one who richly deserves ~~any~~ good fortune which it may bring," he said, and he handed Cooper's map to Don Castro.

"I hope that I am not giving you ill luck, Señor de Ulloa. It is understood, of course, that if you care to go after them, I will finance your expedition—and you may reimburse me out of the profits," he added hastily, seeing in the little Peruvian's face that his unbreakable pride was about to impel a refusal.

De Ulloa bowed deeply. "I thank you, Señora and Señor Jones," he said; "but I accept it not as a gift, but as a trust. If the mine shall prove lucrative, the profits shall be divided among all of those who have shared the perils of this expedition." His bow included all of his companions. "Nay, señor, I will take it on no other terms."

"By George! I've forgotten something!" exclaimed Arnold, jumping up and with reluctance resigning Nee-Nah to Katherine. "Come along, Tomás."

It was the girl Lanao that Jim had forgotten. When the defenders of the beleaguered *malocca* had quit it, the girl had been overlooked and left lying on its floor. Accompanied by the Aymara, Jim hastened toward the ruined village.

They did not have to go to the *malocca*

to find Lanao. Doubly had she rid herself of her bonds. They found her in the gateway to the compound, lying dead beside her dead father, a smile of fierce scorn upon her handsome features, and her own knife driven through her heart by her own hand.

Jim looked, and his eyes were damp as he turned away. After all, she had loved him.

While Jim was upon his errand, Katherine related to the others some of the wonders which Nee-Nah had told her of Paititi, its people and its god—things which the girl confirmed, ~~but~~ which she did not think wonderful at all, as they had been a part of her daily life for as long as she could remember.

"Well, I'm not going to try to present a brief either for or against a thing which, by all the laws of nature, as we know those laws, is an impossibility," said Jones, who had followed the girl's relation with intense interest. "And the best we can do when we get back to civilization is to conserve our reputations as truth-tellers by a deep and dark silence concerning Paititi. These people, besides, did us too good a turn last night to merit their betrayal to a curious world which they do not know and would not welcome."

"Paititi is not ready for the world; and most decidedly, the world is not ready for Paititi. Let Father Time make the introduction when he shall see fit."

"All the same I should like to offer a suggestion—I will not call it a theory. Miss Nee-Nah, will you please say again the name of your god?"

"Pro - Tay - Us," answered Nee-Nah, puckering her brows in an attempt to follow Jones's language.

"And you call him also the changeful god. You have told us too that his image in the temple at Paititi is a figure half man and half fish; and his signs are a spiral shell and a winged, or finned, serpent—which, by the way, were favorite symbols of the Incas."

"When I was in college, we learned in our Greek mythology of a certain ancient sea-god called Proteus, whence our modern word 'protean,' which means changeful. This old chap Proteus, who, according to the Greeks, held forth in the Carpathian

Sea, was supposed to be able to change his shape and color at will. As he was a prophet also, and therefore quite a personage, he did not escape the poet Milton, who made use of him in his 'Comus,' calling him the 'Carpathian Wizard.'

"There you have Pro-Tay-Us, or Proteus, with all his attributes. How a shred of Greek mythology came to be knocking around in this corner of the world some thousand years ago; how a people came to exist here who worship the forgotten sea-god Proteus, if they do; and how they have acquired a part of their deity's reputed powers of change—those things I will not theorize on.

"I yield them gracefully to Daddy Time. I wish to preserve my sanity. I confess that it totters every time I set eyes upon one of these Paititians."

What of truth there was in the reasonings of Jones, time alone will tell. His companions in adventure accepted them. As he wisely remarked, the rest of the world is not yet ready for Paititi.

Shortly after Jim's return from the compound a delegation came from the Paititian encampment. It was made up of Hualla and his nephews—Jaqui, Isako, and Rasco.

With them arrived the time for the answers to Jim's and Nee-Nah's questions. Hualla was ready to start for Paititi. He had come to take his priestess.

Hualla pointed a finger at the high sun, and stated his errand to Nee-Nah in his queer, hissing sentences.

Nee-Nah looked at Arnold. A questioning agony was in the girl's deep eyes, and her beautiful face grew pale as death.

"It is time for Nee-Nah to go, Ah-meer-e-can," she said, her voice trembling piteously.

Would he come with her? Would he leave his own people to follow her? That she should defy Hualla's summons had not occurred to her.

It was her duty calling. It was the will of Pro-Tay-Us speaking through Hualla. She was the priestess of the god. She knew no other life. Ah, would Ah-meer-e-can come?

This was a contingency which Jim's companions, with perhaps a single exception,

had not foreseen. They looked on wonderingly. Katherine happened to glance at De Ulloa. The don was tugging savagely at his mustaches. He, too, had turned very white.

"I would go with you, Nee-Nah—even to Paititi—and for always. But the big world, a new world and a kinder god, are waiting for you beyond the mountains, sweetheart. You belong to them, not these. Won't you go there with me, Nee-Nah? I want to take you home," answered Jim.

Arnold was not eloquent; but it was his call to his mate that he had uttered, and all who heard it felt its force.

Nee-Nah hesitated, seeking words to reply. Her world was toppling. Amid its chaos she knew only that she should die if she were to be separated from Ah-meer-e-can.

A hand touched Jim's arm, and he turned. De Ulloa had risen and stood beside him. The little don's breath was coming hard and fast, and the deep hollows which the fever had dug his eyes blazed with a strange light.

"Do I understand that the young *señor* wishes to make this unknown *señorita* his honored wife?" he asked.

"You do," answered Jim, his own gray orbs beginning to snap angrily.

"Then the time has come for Castro de Ulloa to speak a word in this matter."

"Señor de Ulloa—" began Jim.

Don Castro raised his hand.

"I have the right, Señor Arnold," he said gently. "She is my daughter."

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### THE ANSWERS—AND THE END.

ALL of De Ulloa's auditors stared at him—his English-speaking friends, who understood him; Nee-Nah, who only half comprehended; and the Paititians, who, with the exception of Hualla, did not comprehend at all.

Though his stony face did not change a muscle, deep in the brain of Hualla burned a light of understanding.

"She is my daughter," repeated Don Castro, looking from one to the other of

them. His hand crept up in its old, habitual gesture.

"It is the truth, *señora* and *señores*. She is the *Señorita Esmeralda de Ulloa*. I have sought her for these many years, and I have found her. She does not understand."

He removed his hat and stepped nearer to the bewildered girl, gazing into her face appealingly.

"*Señorita*—I am your father, *señorita*—your father, *Castro de Ulloa*. See?" He drew a chain from his bosom and opened its pendent locket. The girl looked at the pictured face within the golden frame.

"How that can be?" she gasped fearfully. "That me! That *Nee-Nah*!"

"No, *señorita*"—the big voice was gentle as a woman's—"it is your mother's face."

"My—mother!"

*Nee-Nah* caught the locket from him. There was that in her eyes which might have compelled even the still, smiling lips of the photograph to answer. They *did* answer. Clutching the bit of gold and its golden message to her breast, *Nee-Nah* crept into the trembling arms which were open wide to receive her.

Don *Castro* pressed his lips to her forehead. *Arnold*, who was very near, heard him whisper: "It is the will of God." Holding her close, he began to speak:

"I was a colonel in the Peruvian army. My *señora* was an American. A government mission brought me here—into the *Montaña*. Our little child—she was six years old—was stolen from us.

"It killed my *señora*. It made me a broken man. We thought it was the *Chunchos*.

"Then there came to my ears strange rumors, foolish Indian whisperings, hints at impossible things. I began my search, that has never entirely ended until now.

"Journey after journey I made into the *Montaña*, always searching. My money went. I began to grow old. Then you came, *Señor Jones*, and I took new hope; for you wished to go far.

"Can you wonder, *señor*, that I started when you spoke of an emerald one day at *Chavin*? It seemed to me to be a sign. *Esmeralda* is the Spanish for emerald.

"Do you wonder that I seemed beside myself on the night when you told me of the white girl *Nee-Nah*, when I tell you that *Nena* was the name our little daughter always called herself? *Nena* in Spanish means 'baby,' *señor*. It was one of the few Spanish words she knew; for at her mother's knee she had learned the English. Is it strange that I was insane when I found how near to me had been the one for whom I had searched so many years?

"You will ask me, perhaps, why I have kept silence. It is because I could not know what she would be when I found her.

"I tell you, *Señor Arnold*, that ours is a proud race. Had I found her other than she is, and as you have known her, neither she nor yonder man would now be standing alive in the sunlight."

He paused for breath, and pointed a quivering finger at *Hualla*.

"But I find my daughter as a *De Ulloa* should be found—clean and honorable in the sight of God and man. And again I say, it is the will of God.

"*Señor Arnold*, I will answer you. My daughter will not go back to the great *Paititi*. And—though I find her after all my years of searching only to lose her again—she shall be your wife, if it is her will to be. For you are a man of honor, *señor*—and you love her greatly."

*De Ulloa* bowed and offered his hand to *Arnold*.

"But you shall not lose her, *Señor de Ulloa*!" cried *Jim*, seizing it. "If you won't come to the States with us, by *George*! I'll settle in Peru, and go into partnership with you in this emerald deal which *Bob Jones* has wished on to you. Is that a go—er—er—confound it! What's the Spanish for father-in-law, anyhow?"

*Nee-Nah* straightened up suddenly and addressed *Hualla* in hissing *Paititian*.

"Is that true, *Hualla*?" she demanded.

"It is true, thou who hast been my daughter in name, and whom I have loved even as my daughter. Thou art daughter to this man. From him we took thee when thou wert very small."

"I go not back to *Paititi*, *Hualla*."

She spoke with a finality which precluded discussion; and there was more than

a hint of her father's pride and firmness in the poise of her head and the set of her chin. Hualla looked long at the ground.

"Pro-Tay-Us has spoken this day, my daughter," he replied. "And know this: Ito the high priest is dead. I, Hualla, head of the ancient house of Hualla, am now the priest of Pro-Tay-Us.

"I say to thee that I shall not seek to compel or persuade thee. Thou shalt go with thine own people, which is right; and Hualla will be very sorrowful and very lonely without thee; for he has loved thee very long, and cherished thee when thou wert a little thing and wailed when the darkness stole through the temple doors.

"And I say to thee further, that thou art the last of the priestesses of Pro-Tay-Us. After thee there shall be no other. I shall make it a decree of the god. I see that this stealing of babes from their own people is an evil thing, and in time would bring evil upon Paititi."

He stepped forward and raised his hands in blessing.

"Farewell, my daughter."

"Farewell, Hualla; and thou, too, Isako, Rasco, and Jaqui. Nee-Nah will never forget thee."

Over the girl's bowed head three of the Paititians raised their hands in a parting salute as they whispered their farewells. But Jaqui came and stood beside her. Jaqui loved her; but more than that, Jim Arnold was the idol of his heart, which was as constant as his skin was changeable.

"I will stay with my sister and with the Fire-Maker," he declared.

Hualla extended his hands again. "Farewell to thee also, son of my brother Sanyono," he whispered; and Rasco and Isako added their "Farewell, brother."

With a bow of recognition and farewell to Jim Arnold, the three Paititians turned their faces eastward and vanished in the jungle. Half an hour later the furtive legion which had come to the aid of its periled priestess was marching back on its mysterious way to the great Paititi.

Carried in a grass-cloth bag by Isako, a curious thing went with them. It was a human head, a ghastly, diminutive head, scarcely the size of a man's closed fist, yet

the head of a man, and a white man. On its features, set there to remain until its substance should crumble and perish, was stamped a calm, benevolent smile.

Among the Aguaruna Indians of the Peruvian *Montaña* is cherished a hideous art, which has been known and practised by them for countless generations. It is that of preserving and shrinking the heads of their enemies taken in battle. The bones of the skull are removed through an incision above the nape of the neck; and the flesh which remains is cured and shrunk over the astrigent smoke of a fire of palm-roots.

Such is the hellish perfection to which these red "artists" have attained, that their work retains not only its true lifelike proportions, but its *expression*.

The specimen which the Paititians bore with them was the handicraft of a master, wrought of an amazingly promising subject. It had been found in the *malocca* of the Aguaruna *curaca*. It hangs now beside the high altar of Pro-Tay-Us, the changeful god, and smiles its changeless smile at his silent worshipers, who come many-hued as the morning to kneel on the mosaic floor of colors in Paititi's wonderful temple. Some of them whisper prayers to it.

Strange end of Zalmon's schemes and dreams!

Of the return of Bob Jones's party to the western coast, there is little to relate. Old Icorro sent an escort of stalwart Antipa warriors to accompany his white friends to the fringes of civilization; and, though the hardships of the journey were heightened by the loss of their supplies, the travelers met with no withering privations.

In the mountains of the Cordillera they bade farewell with many regrets to big Tomás, who returned to his native Aymara hills to await the day when the little master should have need of him again.

One event of the journey deserves more than a passing mention. It took place in the same little adobe church in the village of San Marcos where *los Americanos* had attended the funeral of Enrique, the Cholo muleteer; and it attracted an even greater crowd.

The same white-haired *cura* who, on former occasion, had pronounced the burial

service, married James Arnold, of Dorchester, to the Señorita Esmeralda de Ulloa—Jim will always call her Nee-Nah.

King Kelly was best man at the wedding, and Don Castro gave the bride away, and nearly tugged his mustache out by the roots in the excitement of his duties.

At the earnest entreaties of his friends—it was his daughter's plea that fetched him—the little don consented to go with them to the States. He was the more willing because of his son-in-law's promise that he would return south and settle in Peru.

Fast steamers and faster locomotives hurried the members of the party on toward the last big scene in the drama for Bob and Katherine Jones.

"It's nearly a year now, Bob—how do you think he will look? He won't have forgotten his mother, anyway! Oh, isn't there any way to get there *faster*?" On this theme Kate's mother-heart played a thousand variations.

Nearly a year! It was mid-August when Bobby Jones had been taken from his father's garden in Detroit. It was early June when Bob Jones, Sr.; his wife, Jim Arnold, and one other—caution dictated that the party should be small—crouched in an evergreen thicket under tall pine-trees on the Isle au Haut, and turned anxious eyes toward an old stone house, half-hidden by trees, some hundreds of yards away.

Grimshaw's note had advised Jones to be circumspect. He had followed the advice. Jaqui was the fourth member of the party.

Misty morning turned into clear and pleasant day. Along the woodland path from the old house strolled a man and a boy. The man was dark and shifty-eyed, and wore gold rings in his ear-lobes. The boy was as full of spring and mischief as the red Irish terrier that leaped beside him.

Kate Jones was first to see them coming; and she began to tremble so that her big husband gathered her in his arms and supported her.

"He's all right, little girl, all right! Just five minutes more," he whispered.

Arnold nudged the Paititian, who was dressed for the occasion in the next-to-native garb of his native tropics.

"Here they come, Jakey! And look out that the dog doesn't spoil it."

Jaqui slipped away among the trees. Before he had gone five yards the three pairs of watching eyes behind him could not distinguish him from the foliage among which he moved.

"Oh, Bob! If something should go wrong!"

Something did go wrong, very wrong; but it wasn't Bobby Jones who suffered from it.

An alder thicket stood beside the path. The terrier, trotting ahead, passed it. The man and boy were nearly abreast of it, when the dog turned back, stopped with one foot lifted, bristled, snarled, and leaped at the alders.

Spanish Luis was "quick to act." With a curse he flung himself sidewise, clutching inside his coat. A lithe green figure, from which the terrier fled yelping, was almost as quick.

Luiz never drew the pistol for which his hand had dived. But he did reach his sailor's knife.

"Bobby! Bobby! Bobby!"

At sound of that sweet, woman's voice, the boy, who had stood, startled, but too brave to run, leaped like a galvanized tin.

"It's mother! Oh, mummy! Mummy! Come on, Mike!"

A small figure on feet that flew raced down the path to the waiting haven of mother-arms.

"Bobby! Thank God!"

Two strong bodies were interposed now to shield the lad from any possible mischief by Spanish Luiz.

But Luiz was done with mischief. He lay dead in the grass beside the path, and Jaqui lay beside him. The Paititian lived long enough to kiss Arnold's hand, and then he, too, went into the big shadow.

Outside of the fact that Luiz had taught him a few gingery Spanish cuss-words, Bobby was found to be very much O. K.

"But, mother, I thought you an' daddy jus' never *would* come! Ain't this Mike a beaut, though? He's *mine*."

Once more the Joneses are living peacefully in their Detroit home. Jones, Jr.—not always peacefully—is going to school.

An Irish terrier has had some difficulty in winning the regard of South Seas Molo; but Michael has finally accomplished it.

King Kelly and Nambe have gone back to Bomavalu. Jim Arnold and De Ulloa have operations under way at Cooper's

(The end.)

emerald mine; and the evil destiny that for so long seemed to attach to those wonderful green gems has left them.

And Nee-Nah? The one-time priestess of Pro-Tay-Us is teaching a gray-eyed youngster to lisp his Christian prayers.



# Ten Minutes by Valgard Dengir

**W**HEN that sharp, authoritative rap sounded on the door, that rap which ushered in the ten dominant minutes of such tremendous import to him, Patrick Torblend had just patted his dress tie and was approving his reflection in the wide mirror.

Go back a little. You saw Torblend, after three years in foreign parts, land again in New York and go straight to the now out-of-date hotel which he had always frequented in former days. He was like that, a man of exacting habitude. You saw him, wealthy and in his air coldly complacent, regain in three hours that fine grooming which sets off your professional New Yorker, as a bit of crotch-mahogany veneer is set off by its cunning coats of finish.

You saw him, then, call up a certain great house on the Drive. You saw him accept with cool condescension an invitation to dinner and the opera—an invitation for which, three years previously, he would have bartered his very soul. And perhaps, during these three years, he had bartered his soul.

You saw him dress, alone in his room. The evening clothes fetched from London, most exquisite in material if not in cut; the little belongings of jewelry, from studs to cigarette-case, running up into the thousands in current values if not in real worth; the pile of cables and telegrams carelessly tossed on the table, half read, although they involved a million or so in total. And, as he began to tie his bow, you saw him approach the room telephone and ask to have ice-water sent up at once.

It was this act which destroyed him.

He finished his tie and slipped into his coat. He stood before the mirror and patted the tie approvingly, eying his reflection with an air of coldly conscious approbation. He looked well and knew it; scarcely over thirty, his mustache neatly trimmed, his face smooth and plump—looking very vigorous, very polished, very like other faces, trim and cynically prosperous, which flashed by in taxicab and subway and private car along the avenue.

Then the sharp, authoritative rap at the door.

Patrick Torblend turned swiftly, an indefinable something ruffling his features, as a smooth pond is ruffled when the sedge at the brink is shaken. For an instant he paused. He must have remembered that only one who is summoned can come to a door in a New York hotel of this day and age; he must have recollected that here the unexpected cannot happen, that here there are no mistakes, that here one is disturbed only at one's own call. He took out his cigarette-case, placed an Egyptian tube between his lips, took from the pile of money on the dresser a quarter which he tossed to the water-tray on the table.

"Come in," he called, then turned aside and stooped over the match-holder to light his cigarette. He had unlocked the door upon ordering the ice-water. He did not glance up as the door opened, noiselessly.

But, when he became aware that no figure stepped forward to the table, he glanced up.

## II.

WHEN you order ice-water to your guarded and barriered hotel room, it is a matter of routine. But, if you glance up to see the door closed, a uniformed figure standing against it and staring at you with frightful recognition—the figure of a man whom you expected never to see again this side of hell—well, there is something terrible in that!

Patrick Torblend stood perfectly motionless, looking at the door. His eyes seemed to pierce through the man before him, through the door, through into the very outer air itself, in a dreadful agony of escape. Then the look was gone from his eyes, and he lifted the cigarette to his mouth.

"Ferguson!" he said, but the word shook upon his lips. One fancied him suddenly dripping and drooling out the word, as though a phantom of senile age had entered into his soul and left it old and gray and awful.

"Ferguson! No—Ferguson's dead—"

The figure at the door suddenly moved. Its hands had been stealing upward; now they darted at the key, turned it, slipped it from its socket.

In this act, Patrick Torblend realized that Ferguson was not dead at all.

"Good evening, Mr. Torblend," said Ferguson, coming forward. In his uniform he looked boyish and trim, except that his shoulders sagged somewhat. But now he removed his little pill-box cap and tossed it into the water-bucket which he had set down inside the door; he tossed it with a gesture of finality, as one tosses away forever some trifling object whose usefulness is done and ended.

The little cap gone, his hair showed gray in the sharp light of the room. Neither old nor young, then! It was hard to tell. His face was indeterminate, ageless. Only the eyes sparkled very brightly, shone wide and clear, like spotted gray agate. In stories, the villains very often narrow their lids and peer searchingly; but in real life, one is terribly afraid of the wide-eyed man.

"I knew that you would come back, Mr. Torblend—some day," said Ferguson, and halted.

Torblend's cold poise was ripped and shattered on the instant. His eyes made one swift dart to the open trunk on its rack—the trunk where his revolver lay upon the pile of clothes. It was at the other side of the room. Then his hand slid to the telephone beside him. His eyes gripped again on Ferguson. He lifted the telephone and put the receiver to his ear. Some horrible premonition came to him as Ferguson smiled and spoke.

"The floor operator and clerk—is my sister."

Torblend dropped the telephone at the words. It was well done, that dropping; one felt that his fingers had involuntarily loosed the instrument. But Ferguson shook that gray head of his, still smiling slightly.

"My sister is watching for that," he observed pleasantly. "She's been watching for some time; about three years, I believe."

Torblend shook the ash from his cigarette, licked his lips, and flung the cigarette petulantly into a corner. Again Ferguson shook his head, and spoke as one reproves a child.

"Nonsense, Mr. Torblend! You really can't set fire to anything from a cigarette; not even gasoline. Will you sit down? I

sha'n't detain you long. Ten minutes, perhaps, at most."

His voice was gentle, ingratiating, the voice of an inferior begging a favor. Yet Patrick Torblend seemed very pale. He glanced about him, and dropped into the chair beside the table. After that first startled ejaculation he had said nothing. He seemed desperately trying to overcome the terror which had mastered him.

This terror must have been a mental panic rather than a physical fright, for there was certainly nothing about Ferguson to frighten any one. The man was rather small, and the tightly fitting jacket-uniform accentuated this lack of size. He held no weapon. His manner was quite subservient. Even his voice was respectful.

A scant two minutes had passed since the door opened.

Ferguson remained standing, watching the seated Torblend with those gray agate eyes, so wide and even expressionless. There was not the slightest menace in his attitude. One would have said without hesitation that he was expecting some orders from Torblend.

"Well?" said Torblend at last, scowling blackly at him.

"Just a few minutes," said Ferguson. He spoke with a gentle vagueness, as though talking to himself. "You know," he added apologetically, "we used to know you pretty well three years ago, all of us. We all liked you—I, and my sister Edna, and my brother Larry. Poor Larry is dead now. He was crippled, of course, and it could not be expected—yes, we liked you. Edna and I have waited, quite sure you would return. Larry always said that you'd do the right thing when you did show up—"

His voice trailed away. Suddenly he appeared to be just a wistful, feeble little old man, lost in some introspective musing thought.

A gleam of hope glittered in the eyes of Patrick Torblend. As he looked and listened, he mastered the inward panic that had come upon him. He regained his poise and his fighting power. The gleam in his eye showed that he scorned himself for having thought this fellow would dare hurt him.

"I see," he said quietly, and took out a fresh cigarette. "Smoke, Ferguson?"

The other man reached forward, inspected the tube, and smiled as he felt for a match.

"Larry used to send them home to us," he said. "The real article, eh? None of your doped and damned imitation Turkish—yes, the real Egyptian. Larry used to send them to us."

Torblend felt that it was time he took the situation in hand.

"Well?" he said sharply, with the implication that he was a busy man. "You wanted to speak with me, Ferguson?"

"Yes, of course," said the other. "If you don't mind."

Torblend smiled a little. He was amused by the sudden fright that had gripped him. This man might be a damned good actor, but that was improbable; quite improbable! No, the trouble lay in himself. He should have known better than to be afraid or to have even hesitated an instant.

"Go ahead," he said, relaxing in his chair and inhaling the cigarette.

"Well," said Ferguson, "you see, it was over three years ago that you came to board with us. Larry had just come home then, crippled. He'd been caught by a wounded lion—but you know all that, of course. He had brought home with him the secret of that new mining-field down in South Africa.

"We were all quite poor then, and it was a godsend to have you as a boarder. Then Edna got that job in Jersey City, and went over there for the summer, and I was working nights. So when Larry came down with the fever, you nursed him. We all liked that. It was fine in you, Mr. Torblend. We knew he wouldn't live so very long, of course.

"So you had the secret from him while he was ill. That was all right. We talked it over, all of us. We decided that you were the man to take it in hand and go away to turn it into a fortune; you were employed in Wall Street and you knew every one, and all that. Then you disappeared very suddenly, and we knew that you had gone. We found out. But that was all right; Larry always said you'd come back and do the right thing by us."

Ferguson coughed slightly.

"I knew you'd stop here," he said. "You'd always spoken so well of this place, and you'd always stopped here before you came to live in New York. So we came here, after Larry died; Edna at the telephone and I down-stairs. Of course, we knew that you'd come. We kept in touch with things. We knew about the new mining-field opening up, and we read about the tremendous fortune you had made down there."

Ferguson paused, then made a gesture.

"That's all," he concluded lamely. "You've come, that's all. And we're here. I suppose you'll do the right thing, like Larry said?"

Torblend smiled thinly. What a fool to have been afraid of—this!

"Nonsense, Ferguson," he said, perfectly poised again, perfectly himself. "I'm not nearly so rich as you think. That mining-field had little to do with it—the affair was rather a fizzle; started out big and then blew up."

Ferguson stared at him. In the gray, wide eyes was a shocked surprise—a hurt look.

"You don't mean, Mr. Torblend," he asked plaintively, "that—that you won't do the right thing?"

Torblend still smiled at him, master of the affair now.

"Nothing doing, Ferguson," he said crisply. "If I let you blackmail me once, you'd be doing it forever. No—nothing like that, thanks! Besides, there's nothing coming to you at all. Nothing."

As he spoke, he was watching Ferguson narrowly, muscles gathered in readiness. Perhaps he was mistaken after all—

But no. Ferguson merely looked a little older, a little more bowed and helpless. A frown of puzzled dismay creased his brow. Then he turned.

"Very well," he said weakly. "Very well. No more to be said, of course, Mr. Torblend. I hope—I hope I haven't intruded on you."

Torblend did not reply. He watched Ferguson go to the door, pick up his cap, take up the ice-bucket and return. He watched the man narrowly, suspiciously,

alert for the least sign of menace. But none came.

Ferguson poured the water and clinking ice into the silver pitcher, turned up a glass in readiness, picked up the quarter and pocketed it.

"Thank you, sir," he said, and went to the door. "Anything else, sir?"

"Nothing, thanks," responded Torblend, still suspicious.

Ferguson unlocked the door, opened it, and departed. Since his arrival, eight minutes had elapsed—no more.

### III.

THE instant his caller was gone, Torblend was out of his chair with a leap, and at the door. He locked it, then swung about, a laugh on his lips.

"What a damned fool I was!" he cried out, almost gayly. "Why, for a minute I was actually afraid of the poor devil—if he'd come at me with a demand, I'd have given him a hundred thousand and thought it cheap! Conscience, I suppose. Damn conscience! Nothing like getting a grip on yourself, eh?"

He puffed at his cigarette, which had burned low, and then tossed it into a cuspidor. Still laughing at the thought in his mind, he stepped to the table, poured himself a glass of water from the silver pitcher, and drank it.

"Ah," he reflected, "I suppose it 'd be safer, all the same, to move—or else have him and that sister of his fired. That 'd be the better way, I imagine—"

A queer look came into his eyes—a look of surprise, of incredulous astonishment, of realization. He looked down at the silver pitcher; an oath fell from his lips as he dashed it to the floor. He threw out his arms, then forced one hand to his mouth, evidently in the effort to gag himself. Turning, he rushed toward the bathroom.

Too late! He staggered, reeled, clutched at the wall. He fell through the bathroom doorway. Only his left ankle and foot remained visible from the room as he lay. For a moment the foot jerked slightly—then was still.

The ten minutes were up.

# Odd and Beautiful by Ferdinand Grahame



"Fo' the fuhst time it may be said that the Fo'th of July is of almost univuhsal celebration throughout No'th Cah'lina. This State has not been much given to celebrations of the so't in the past—

**A**ND so fo'th and so fo'th." The dignified, white-haired reader on the porch had abridged contemptuously, his eye running down the newspaper article to its final phrase:

"—Hencefo'th the Fo'th of July is going to be as big a day in the So'th as in any othuh pa't of the Nation."

Colonel Blalock pointed one long and ominous forefinger at the afternoon gathering on his lawn; taking a savage bite at his even lengthier black cigar, always smoked dry, he pushed his gray hat further back on his leonine head. A most impressive picture he made—but it was his long forefinger that held them. His people sensed the unusual coming, and unusual things were more than rare in Callabee—not to mention as emanating from Colonel Trahern Blalock.

For a full minute he stood motionless, the finger bearing all the burden of his pregnant pause.

And the townfolk stared at that fingertip, fascinated—just as you and I have been spelled under some orator's commanding digit, until we'd got hardened to

it. In all the population of Callabee, North Carolina, not one soul had ever before felt the thrall of a threatening finger, to each one seeming so individually pointed; and all three hundred of them were there, in the Blalock front yard. A very unusual proceeding.

Now the colonel's index-finger withdrew part-way, to angle itself grimly toward the editorial in his other hand. An offensive and a disturbing editorial, it appeared to be.

"That piece of reading, ladies and gen'lemen, is to be found on the edituh's puhsonal page in the Cha'lotte *Obsuhvuh* of t'-day"—he clenched the paper and rapped it smartly against his open palm—"t'-day, the Fo'th of July in this the Yeah of Ouh Lo'd, Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen!"

From his own goodly height, plus the four-step porch, Colonel Blalock gazed down paternally upon the small sea of faces for an instant before he resumed:

"'A Day That Has Become Populuh,' the editoyul is headed. But it shall nevu become populuh with us folks heah in Callabee. And why do we decline to be a pahty to this innovation? Is it that we feel a spite against the people of the No'th; because of the late unpleasantness—ah—moah or less late now? No; we beah them no ill-will. The events of ovuh fifty yeahs

ago make now but a closed book, sealed and getting dusty—like the moah late Spanish Wah seemed to get almost immediately aftuh I'd been given my commission. I repeat; wah is not why!"

He paused to clear a throat unaccustomed to public speaking; never before had he felt it his duty to talk so forcibly. "We folks of Callabee object to being told *when* to celebrate and *what* to celebrate. We prefuh to pick out ouh own holidays. That's why, ladies and gen'lemen, we rise to rebel!"

An approving hum cemented the colonel's opinion into a fact.

"And we entuhtain only respect and admuration fo' the great Washin'ton and fo' the equally famous Greene; we have named upwahds of a dozen towns in No'th Cah'lina aftuh Mistuh Greene. Ouh complaint t'-day is based on puhsonal grounds only. Heah in Callabee we've got the best town in the State—in the United States—yes, and on the face of the entiah globe, I modestly decla'h!"

"Why, then, should we have ouh holidays picked out of the calendah by the No'th? I assuht that we've got the best people heah in Callabee, too—" he went on, his voice rising in their defense. "The best people alive! Why shouldn't we be? We've got no troubles—don't let ouhselves have 'em. Having no troubles, we keep gentle; having no troubles, we stay kind and loving to'ahds each othuh—" "

Bang! A wisp of blue smoke curled up from the shoulder-high hedge to the west of the yard. The colonel took off his Stetson; sunlight came through a tiny, round hole drilled in the rim.

"This may hint at one small trouble I had inadvuhtently ovuhlooked," he said. "It is only that old devil next doah, so'th, my friends; be calm."

The assemblage was perfectly calm. Some hadn't even bothered to turn their heads. Everybody knew the meaning of that gun-shot—nothing unusual in it, and they didn't mind.

Only one man asked, quite superficially:

"Homer Palley, wasn't it? The old feluh who—"

"Who hasn't beauty enough in him to've evuh raised a hedge round his dwelling, suh. Yes, suh. Reckon that's why he shot from behind mine."

Colonel Blalock replaced his pinked hat—to remove it quickly once more that he might wipe his brow; yet the cold kind of sweat had not been there.

"Hot, colonel?"

"Right, wahm, suh. But it doesn't get neah so wahm down heah as it does this time of yeah up No'th, suh."

No dissenting voice was heard. The good folk of Callabee would have solemnly sworn their Carolina hills either cooler or warmer than similar altitudes northward, whichever comparison the season of year might require.

"To go back to my point befo' this mild distuhbance"—the colonel pursued—"not one of us heah t'-day would lift a finguh to hahm a dog." Eying the hedge, he raised both his thin hands benignly. "We of Callabee, an old-fashioned, law-abiding and God-fearing people, gathuh heah now to obsuhve ouh semiannual Centennial—and *not* fo' the Fo'th of July. Ouh city of Callabee was founded one hund'ed and fifty yeahs ago t'-day by pioneahs on the edges of civilization, and we haven't changed a mite since."

He stopped for a sip of water.

"Looks like good white co'n in that glass," said some one 'way back, wistfully.

"It is not, howevuh, suh," said the colonel. "The So'th has beaten the No'th in proh'biton, same as in ev'rything else. Down heah we've stamped the evil entiahly out."

He caught the sound of a happy chuckle—smothered, as if it hadn't meant to be heard. "All except the liquoh what yo'-all make and bring into town, Tom Palley," the colonel qualified.

His old eyes were searching for the author of that chuckle, who now stepped free of the crowd and obligingly into full view. An up-standing, clear-featured boy he was; in his middle twenties, perhaps, and a sort of military ruggedness written on him.

"Haven't yo'-all got bettuh sense than to laugh on a day like this, Tom Palley?" the

orator asked aggrievedly. "And how come yo' don't quit making it when the government says—"

"While spring-water keeps a-flowin' and green corn keeps a-growin', there'll be white liquor cooked in Caroliny,'" young Palley chanted.

"I deploah that the ahmy didn't teach yo'-all moah obedience, suh."

"I ain't been convinced that it's disobedience to make use of our own land, sir—so long as they don't catch us at it," grinned the soldier.

"I'll have yo'-all up yet, young man," the colonel declared hotly. "Soon as I'm able to locate the spot yo' keep the liquoh hid away in, I'll—"

A second shot rang out. The report had dove-tailed into a lightning move on the part of Blalock—a sample of draw-and-fire creditable to half his years.

"Didn't git him—eh, col'nel?" the town-objector sympathized.

"I feah not, suh. And I must ask the ladies and gen'lemen heah to ovuhlook the intrusion of old Mistuh Palley from next doah, so'th, into t'-day's pleasuahs. It's just a—a so't of second ill-natuah with him to shoot at me."

"But, col'nel, yo'-all shot, too!"

"Suhainly, suh. Would yo' have me outdone in cuhtesy by an enemy?"

"Seems like yo'-all ought to quit pepper-in' at each othuh so much," complained the objector.

"We both have ouh reasons, suh. Neithuh of us evuh shoots blindly; I will admit that one of us always pestuhs the othuh into it."

"It's because yo' bought in our mortgage, colonel, and pestered father with the foreclosure notice this morning that he's shooting at yo'-all now," stated Tom Palley. "How come that had to be?"

"Fo' my own puhpose," the colonel replied, absently fingering his revolver. "It may hint at old Mistuh Palley having to move away from next doah, so'th, befo' long."

To the soldier Trahern Blalock's face had shown grim; now the fine features softened as he addressed his towns people once more. Railing at celebrations in general, the col-

onel hastened on with his own small celebration—gesturing it with his gun.

"I'll soon be done detaining yo' folka, ladies and gen'lemen. Yonduh sunflowuh a-twisting with the sun tells me it's fo' o'clock in the evening—five o'clock the people up No'th insist on making it. But with that, too, we of Callabee decline to comply. Such new-fangled playing with God's houhs is—ah—daylight-slaving time, it should be called."

Again the crowd buzzed approval. If not exactly agreeing on the temperance question, all were in perfect accord on resistance to those clock-juggling schemes; their old time had stood staunch for generations.

The colonel waited for quiet, his eyes shifting to the hedge as if in doubt whether he had scored a hit in that direction or not. Then his gaze passed on to the timber fringing the west—dense pine and gum owned by himself—and he pointed.

"But we must not judge the No'th too seveahly. We must remembuh that even Callabee heah is unlike the almanac in its sunsets—that we have ouh sunsets a full half-houh soonuh than ouh neighbuhs; but that was Heaven's business, in making the timber grow so thick. Ouh chickens go to bed by it; so do we, mostly. Let othuh folks call us odd fo' doing it—we don't mind. Fo' what could be moah beautiful than the slipping of the sun into the tops of the foliage yonduh? It's all ouh own—so let us keep on being odd."

A girl rose from her seat on the steps; she pulled down the old lion-head and whispered something into its ear.

"What's that, Nancy, deah?" She undertoned once more. "Why, yes, Nancy, deah. I reckon."

"Odd and beautiful," Nancy said aloud, and impressively.

While her father was seeming to ponder that combination of ideas, Nancy turned to wink lovingly at the rugged soldier-moon-shiner; with brazen premeditation he had moved close to her.

"I have fohmulated a'deep proposition," said the colonel at last, his tone calm and low. "I will explain, ladies and gen'lemen, in detail." He leaned earnestly toward the

population of Callabee. "The idea is, folks, not to celebrate what we've done in the past, or what we plan to do some day to come—but what we should be doing t'-day. Ouh ev'ry-day acts—celebrate them. Celebrate each and ev'ry day by doing some right nice deed of kindness, something that may-be outsideus would call odd—but something to make ouh daily life moah happy, and sweetuh, and even moah beautiful than it is' now. Let our maxim be: 'Odd and Beautiful.'"

The three hundred rustled their appreciation. Very simple and human in their fealty to the old régime, the folk of Callabee were quite as naturally modern in their desire to be different from other towns roundabout—and consequently better. They profoundly admired their colonel's altruistic idea, and fell in with it without venturing too exhaustively into its meaning. They were eager to do anything the first citizen should tell them to do; they had all been brought up that way.

"Odd and beautiful!" They hummed it back and forth, and up again at him.

"Odd and beautiful," he repeated. "Sounds right good. I reckon yo' bettuh begin doing 'em t'-day. And tell othuhs about it, and what yo'-all do yo'self; keep at it next day and fo' fifty yeahs or so longuh."

The town-objector, a frequent annoyance, spoke in here louder than the buzz:

"But how come this all-time fightin' of liquoh, then, col'nel—"

"Well, suh?"

"It's odd enough, but damn if it's beautiful!"

Colonel Trahern Blalock knew his town.

Left alone now, and stooping to pick up the officious newspaper with its Fourth-of-July idea, he reflected that Callabee would give his far superior idea an honest trial; and he was correct in this opinion, as surely correct as that no man save a relic of the old South like himself would ever have advanced such a plan.

Sleepy little Callabee was a fit candidate for experimental incursioning into Arcadia. It nestled in the pine-tree country, mid-way between the seventy-ninth and

eightieth meridians and only a few miles from the South Carolina boundary—a blissfully moribific village on a merciful hill.

Arrived at the half-way post of its second century, Callabee still rested content in the knowledge that everything about itself was either better, or not so bad, as the distant North. This adjustable balancing-phrase was idiomatic of it and of little sister towns; no people could be more clannish, none so resentful of the stranger within their gates, nor so jealous of their very medievalisms—perhaps because of unadmitted consciousness of them—as were those who lived in that baby Southern hamlet.

Folk who live north of the Mason-Dixon or west of Father Mississippi unite in regarding the far reaches of their country as the U. S. A. in the whole; but to the Callabees there still were only the South and the North, two lands remotely apart.

In Colonel Blalock's town persisted one hotel, struggled heroically one schoolhouse and contents—and thrived righteously two churches, one each for white and colored citizenry. But some day soon they were to have a new schoolhouse, after the larger near-by towns had been satiated.

December 25—with, instead of "Merry Christmas," its salutation of "C'rismus' Gif'"—and a black hand extended—was the only *bona-fide* holiday. Occasionally Mecklenburg Day was observed, and the town's own birthday about once every fifty years. Imagine, then, the shock of that Charlotte newspaper's editorial to a self-sufficiency which could blandly ignore the anniversary of our biggest treaty with ourselves.

But Colonel Blalock's wonderfully original idea would serve to calm any justifiable wrath over suggested new holidays. In Callabee now every day should be a holiday; the town would proceed to become newly odd and beautiful—and no other town, even in the So'th, could possibly be both of these. The colonel had said as much—and was he not the wealthiest timber-seller and turpentine-sapper in the Carolinas? He was.

Thus Callabee may be seen built not on sand figuratively, although in a literal sense it was; dead central in the bleak sand-hills,

which will grow trees and fruits and crops of sorts, but that are most inhospitable to garden-truck and even to common grass—Colonel Blalock's being the only lawn in town, and it a sodded and saddened affair. But folks in Callabee didn't care so much for grass.

Here and there were lonely magnolia-trees, the best one to the east of the Blalock Colonial house. In the colonel's yard, his one-half of that block, were hollyhocks, too, and vagrant sunflowers; also a single immense bush of cape-jasmine—when in odoriferous bloom an epitaph to the entire square. Sometimes fleet vultures circled overhead to aid imagination.

And, most important, concerning the Blalock hedge; every house in Callabee had its hedge around it—except Homer Palley's in the south half of the Blalock block—but the colonel's hedge was of course the finest. The old gentleman's dream was to carry that hedge completely around the square, but he had never been able to secure the south half. It was a mortgaged property on which Palley had kept up the interest, so the time had been frequently extended.

The colonel's hedge was of an old-world spurge variety, kept roughly trimmed shoulder-high; it looked more stately that high—nothing to do with thieves. No thief had ever come to Callabee, for that matter; and none was expected, in proof of which the Blalock gates—center and at each front corner—were never closed. Four-footed animals were welcome, the colonel said; and he'd risk old Homer Palley venturing in upon the hated land.

One concession to modernism had been made by Blalock, however—a new concrete sidewalk, white and glistening, and the only artificial sidewalk in town, running north and south along the Meeting Street side of his property. But it had been oddly laid *inside* the hedge; while this might be a bit inconvenient for passers-by, at least old Palley was thus deprived of its benefits. Some day, when Colonel Blalock should own the whole block, he would embellish it with an outside sidewalk, all the way around.

If the village were fifty years behind, Colonel Blalock, you may see, was not more

than twenty-five. But for a charming inconsistency strong in the old gentleman, he might have nearly gone under the date-wire. Clinging gallantly to ancient manners and ideals, he yet strove bravely to obey the later laws; laws of his State only—to the devil with the country outside of Cah'lina. One instance was his modern advocacy of prohibition, which got him the appointment as its deputy; he considered whisky bad for the common people around him.

Now, as the sun dropped into his timber-tops, he was carefully rescanning that Charlotte paper—no doubt he had missed some other outrageous improvement. He could have told you consecutively the names of all the Governors of his commonwealth, from the Carolina Grant to maybe the one before the last—but he knew not that such a man as Sydney Porter had ever been born in Greensboro, only a scant hundred miles above him. And the colonel nursed a supreme contempt for all newspapers, they merely reciting other men's opinions, while he preferred his own; he cordially hated his local papers for recording progress in the new South.

A statue of pride, on his porch in the sunset; and angularly dignified height of six feet and more, graced by white neck—long hair under its Stetson—and bushed, snowy eyebrows under a forehead whimsically calm; a Roman nose, and white mustache and goatee with the inevitably unlit, long, black cigar thrust into a corner of firm lips between them; out of his face shining a great love for his fellow man, and the twinkles around his eyes deep from laughing over his own proneness to superstitions—just a dear, old, true gentleman who'd never learned how to do a wrong—such was Colonel Trahern Blalock at sunset on July 4, 1919.

The only fault he would have confessed was that incurable penchant of his for signs and omens; inherited, he claimed.

His deepest affection was for his daughter, Nancy. His sole hate was forever directed at "the old scamp next doah, so'th"—that also had been hereditary. These two, love and hate, were as nearly equal as any counteremotions in human heart and brain may seem to be.

The feud, left to him by his father, was as much a part of Blalock's existence as were his bread and butter—and his corn-bread and hominy grits and fried chicken. It, the enmity, had begun—so oldest inhabitants averred—in some Late-Blalock and Palley-Deceased having been rivals as marksmen. From acute competition in shooting at various targets without conclusive decision, they had taken to shooting at each other.

Faithful inheritance of this hate went to show that a feud may still exist these days, and thrive; verifying tales are often readable in Dixie dailies. Both of these incumbents were widowers now, and neither had set foot on the other's land in several decades. Appropriately trimmed, too, even if conventionally, was this feud; the only son of Palley and the daughter of the House of Blalock loved each other completely, and both surviving and warring parents united in refusing sanction to so peace-making a marriage.

Boy and girl were together now—somewhere—the colonel surmised. He sighed and moved slowly within, to clean and reload his revolver—against the Palleys, father and son.

"Reckon I may have to be fuhst next time," he mused.

As Colonel Blalock had foreseen, Calabee enthused over his new idea. Every resident wanted to do something odd and beautiful, the one small, sweeping difficulty being that nobody could think of anything odd and beautiful to do.

This dilemma seemed to endure for a couple of weeks. Later news revealed an exception, however. It developed that three young best-society men had got busy immediately—on the night of July 5, in fact, at the dance persistently held every week despite a bewildered pastor's weekly protest. At this dance they had formed themselves into a triad of pity and had proposed to the three most ineligible young women of Callabee.

Of these three gentler ones none was the homeliest in all the town. Their previous dearth of matrimonial offer had been caused, severally, by a raspy voice, a raspier tem-

per, and a scantiness of crowning glory—but since this fails to identify them individually nobody's feelings are hurt.

The three noble young fellows—hand-some, all of them—quickly discovered that each had picked out the wrong girl. In the succeeding two weeks each pair changed partners, then balanced all, and did one more grand right and left, all finally finishing satisfactorily mated and announced on July 20.

"Very odd and beautiful," said Nancy Blalock, in telling her father of the wind-up.

"Humph! Reckon they could have matched it soonuh if they'd been as open with each othuh as they've all been with me," was the colonel's comment. "Might have settled it like they did last fuhst."

And the wedding sextette had been done for keeps, as after years went to prove.

Little spirits of kindness, reborn of the words themselves, now kept "Odd and Beautiful" alive in the hearts of Callabee. That trio of best boys had set the pace.

The weazened general-store proprietor did his bit early in the third week of July. He put a monitor over his clerks, pad and pencil ready to jot down a fifty-cent bonus to each one every time he was caught smiling while serving a hard-to-wait-on customer: Beautiful! Private instructions to the clerks were to tack the fifty cents on the price if the customer didn't return the smile: Odd.

Of course these general-store instances were no secrets. The colonel had told everybody to tell everybody else—and nobody could ever keep a secret long in Callabee, anyway; the three young men had established a two-weeks' secrecy record *ad infinitum*.

Most of life's pages in the little town were mighty well thumbed. So much gratified gossip now went on in the mail hour, after the daily stage-coach had come in, that Postmaster Poindexter forgot the prerogative of his perennial tenancy of that democratic job, and actually waxed courteous for once—quickly excusing himself for it with the remark that he reckoned he must be coming down with pellagra.

The hotel landlord experienced a sudden

reversion to old-time Southern hospitality and quit charging the strange traveler sixty cents H. C. L. for the same meal eaten by Callabee at forty-five the issue.

And so neared the tag of July, a month whose last days were to create a period to calculate from, before and after, in the long future. Oddity reached its dizzy height at dusk on the twenty-sixth, when the town-objector was caught up on the stunted church-steeple, painting it blue.

He had been spied out by Colonel Blalock, while that old gentleman was looking for the new moon scheduled to appear about that time—trying to see it accidentally over his left shoulder, in the hope that such good luck might hint at getting the property of Devil Palley next door, south, without much more shooting.

Another resident saw the pest up there a minute afterward and got to the fire-bell first—but loyally refused to wrest the plume of discovery from the colonel.

The defense of the culprit, immediately haled before Callabee's magistrate over just such fool things, was that blue seemed the beautifulest of colors, tallyin' with the sky; and that paintin' up there with it was the oddest thing he could think of, since they wouldn't let him try bass-drum in the band again.

Sweet Nancy was wearing a new voile and her old smile the next day, strolling south on the concrete walk ten feet inside the Blalock yard. Young Tom Palley had shed khaki quite some time before for Carolyn clothes and his old-fashioned grin, neither of which seemed wearing out as he met her and stopped just opposite. The two smiles at once blended into a full understanding, while the sweethearts exchanged nothings over that shoulder-high hedge. What matter their colors of hair and eyes, difference in heft and inches? They both loved.

"Right hot—" Tom suggested.

"Not nearly so hot as up North," bravely answered Nancy. For dad had always said so, so it must be so—even if she had gone to school three years in Pennsylvania.

"Yo'-all come round here and we'll go get a dope—" he offered, in that masculinely commanding way girls adore.

She came. Waves of heat rose from the solid sand of Meeting Street underfoot, but failed to hurry them particularly—only a block and a half to go to the cool corner drug-store, Callabee's one dispensary for the Southland's new national drink, various kinds of it, and all far milder than the collective name of "dope" implies. Boy and girl soon sat together in the roomy drug-store window and talked confidingly.

"Yo'-all know, Nancy—I've been thinkin'," he began with due gravity, "that our fathers' eyes are old. Some o' these times they won't be able to miss so careful."

"If yours would only stay at home, or out on his farm—"

"Reckon we won't have a town home now very long, if yours has his way. Dog-gone spite-work, I call it—buying in that mortgage!"

"Why doesn't yours pay it?" Nancy asked. "Cotton is high enough."

"That's just it." Tom grinned. "Father thinks cotton is going to beat forty and stay there, so he's holding out." The experienced boy laughed softly. "As if the whole United States was going to keep on paying two prices for a shirt, just to give us double money for cotton down here. But he can't see that. An' it's what's wrong with the whole town, thinkin' these swelled prices can last forever. Father's got thirty bales and over, and he'll let the house go before he'd put a plaster on a single one of those cotton-bales."

"I think dad was needlessly—ah—joyful, in the way he served that foreclosure notice," the girl said cautiously. She sighed. "But he couldn't help it, I suppose."

"He could 'a' helped shaking the paper right in my father's face, couldn't he? An' the constable holdin' my old man's arms all the time so he couldn't draw!" Tom finished with disgust.

"Dad is so—so sincere in everything he does."

"He sure is. But father's got the interest money saved up now, most of it—a big wad of bills. Seeing as there's no bank here, he keeps it in a long, reddishlike envelope he's got; 'most like a pocketbook, it is, and didn't cost so much as a wallet, he says."

Tom chuckled a bit. "He keeps the fore-

closure notice that he was insulted with in there, too—in the other compartment in the same envelope—for company, he says. An' he's goin' to put that money and the document together right up to the judge over at the county-seat; he's aimin' to stop that mortgage sale by law."

"It would be the first time the Palleys and the Blalocks ever went to law," said Nancy gently. "And the feud has lasted—"

"Long enough," Tom decided. "It won't live into our generation. We're the only kids, and yo'-all a girl—so skippin' us I reckon the next generation will see both sides of that old feud incorporated into one."

She laughed in quiet sympathy. His tone turned serious.

"I can't believe in this all-time fighting with a man's own townfolks, Nancy. Used to could; can't now. Oh, I can kill all right myself when there's an ocean 'tween me an' Caroliny—but not my home folks any more."

"You're wonderfully changed, Tom, since you're back."

"How come? More prissy, eh?"

"N-n-no. Improved—mostly."

"Can't eat grease in my food now; is that it?" He chuckled. "Yes, I've learned and I been learned. They put a swagger-stick in my hand after I'd been joined three months—an' I didn't have to use a crutch to get back. Got no kick, I reckon."

"Have you done anything odd and beautiful yet, Tom?"

"Only lovin' you harder."

"Pshaw!" A little pause, and she went on, demurely. "Want to do it—for me?"

"Everything."

"Then, listen; be more careful in the way you talk. You can be now, since you've learned the difference. People don't say 'How come' and 'Yo'-all' any more."

"Do here in Callabee."

"But you know better, Tom, yourself. It's only half the time you drop your d's and g's. I try to talk correctly; poor dad can't—but you can, and won't."

"I'll sure try to, too," he promised humbly. "It's sorter a happenstance now when I talk looselike; yo'-all understand—"

"Tom!"

"Sorry." He eyed her soberly—then asked her, slow and precise: "Have—you—spoken to—your father?"

"Every day. Yours—"

"He swears he'll never hear to it while this mortgage is brewing—but I'm my own boss, I reckon—presume."

"I—I think—" and Nancy was considering it carefully, "that dad would consent, if he could only find out where you hide your whisky."

"Tryin' to bribe me?"

"Oh, it's entirely your own business," she replied with studied indifference.

"I sure can't see why the colonel holds off so," Tom complained. "I'm near enough all right, folks say; an' back home a soldier. I don't ever lie or steal or—"

"Then why don't you ask dad for me?"

"Eh?"

"Since you're a soldier—"

"I will!" He grinned sheepishly. "Come right near sayin': 'Reckon I will' that time!"

Just after twilight, on July 28, Tom Palley crept into the Blalock yard from the rear; he lifted the lid of the middle back-doorstep and replenished the half-pint flask. Then he circuted the big house, to where he knew the old colonel would be found on the porch—and to battle.

A battle it was. The town-objector overheard a little of the first of it, so he came closer and ducked down outside the hedge to listen conscientiously.

"I ain't a law-breaker," Tom Palley had urged early in the conversation, "'ceptin' to make a bit of white corn now and then. An' I've been in the army—volunteer, like yo'-all was once, colonel. So what's the kick on me?" Blalock turned away. "My father's holdin' off because of the feud between you two, but I feel sure that's not your reason, sir. I ain't never had a part in your quarrel."

"U-m—no, suh!" the old gentleman replied. "While I hate that devilish cuss living yonduh most wholesouledly, I've nevuh blamed yo'-all fo' his defections, suh." The colonel paused to stroke his Roman nose judicially; then in absent-minded way he scratched the palm of his

left hand—until he caught young Palley's grin. "This may hint at me getting some money out of yoah fathuh right soon, Thomas," was his apologetic explanation.

But the boy went again at the more vital matter on hand.

"I'm asking, colonel, man to man, why yo'-all won't consent to our marriage."

"An' I'm demanding, suh, that yo' tell me yoah hiding-place fo' the jugs of whisky yo'-all keep bringing into Callabee!"

"Couldn't tell you, sir, without lying to you. Haven't ever lied much, an' don't want to commence now."

"Well, suh, when I find it at last yo'-all will wish yo'd told me fuhst."

"Is it because of the moonshinin' I can't have Nancy?"

"No, suh. Not that—alt'gethuh."

"Then what?"

"I reckon I've got my reason, suh," said Trahern Blalock doggedly.

"A reason that can't be told ain't a reason!" Tom retorted. "Don't believe yo'-all got a reason—'ceptin' contrary ones, suh!"

Young Palley's voice kept climbing higher, the colonel's staying in tune—and the eavesdropper gobbled up every word. In telling the details of that quarrel to the first person he met, the objector made Blalock out as mostly to blame, relating how the col'nel had switched back to his precious feud for the purpose of calling down gentlemanly anathema upon the Palleys, past and present—but that he seemed to run short of wind and he'd rushed into the house before getting to the next family crop.

Nancy had met her dad storming in.

She took his hat off and hung it up till morning, she deftly extracted the remains of a mangled cigar and presented a new, long one to his lips, and she kissed the bridge of his prominent nose; then she took him back out on the porch to let nature finish cooling him. All he had said so far was:

"Yo' always know just what to do, Nancy, deah!"

The colonel drew his daughter down upon the arm of his big wicker rocker—and she retailed the eventful, the odd and beautiful, of that especial day. He had heard most of it already, but somehow it all sounded new

when Nancy told it; her mother had had the same gift.

"When's yo' own time coming, deah?" he finally asked.

"To-morrow night, dad—in the churchyard."

"In the—the what?"

"Going to give a party. I've hired both the jitneys."

"Want me?"

"Of course." Emphasized with a kiss.

"Mustn't keep me too long. I've got to cut timbuh t'-morrhuh night—cooluh at night, and the wood don't snap so much in burning aftuhwahds if yo'-all cuts it when the moon's in the Lion." He waved his hand toward Luna, a thin crescent sailing over his gum-trees. "Got to haul it to mahket next mo'ning—We'n'sday."

"Oh, my party won't take long; it mustn't. And we're going to need the moon, too."

"Need the moon fo' a pahty in the chu'chyahd?" Her father gazed at her quizzically. "What so't of a pahty?"

"Can't tell you that, dad. The secret is half of it."

"Seems as if yo' might tell me, deah, since ev'rybody's telling ev'rything else—and since it was all my idea in the fuhst place."

"Was it, dad?" Nancy asked him meaningfully, and vanished. Her way of leaving such points to him was better than contradicting.

"Why, no—it wasn't, eithuh, come to think," said the deserted colonel, answering himself aloud. "It was Nancy's idea—odd and beautiful—she whispuh'd it to me." He sighed as he took a fresh grip on his cigar. "Wonduh if I'll evuh have just one idea of my own!"

Evening of Tuesday, July 29, and Callabee awarded its mental gold medal to Miss Nancy Blalock. And quite early in that evening it dawned upon her father that a churchyard hadn't necessarily meant the graveyard.

Nancy gave her party just in front of the church—to the old ladies of the township over seventy-five. The jitneys had to make three trips each, the seventh old

lady actually coming into Callabee horse-back, and in a habit of years ago too many for memory.

"Why didn't yo'-all use ouh lawn, deah?" Blalock had asked his daughter.

"Some of them might not like you, dad," she had said gently.

"So?"

It was the first time such a thought—that so terrible a thing could be even possible—but no matter now; all the town had been invited—to look on from beyond the low church hedge, and the fact that the colonel was the only visitor privileged inside reassured him somewhat. Everything went off beautifully. The one kick heard was the town-objector's remark that the guests were all too old to flirt—which saves describing him a bachelor.

"We break up this party early," said the girl hostess, as she passed refreshments—ice-cream and the spongiest of cake; and if one old lady was able to take only thin gruel, another severely insisted on having cheese and two bananas. "All you darlings must be started back home to bed before nine," Nancy told them.

The evening star shining gloriously above, the colonel took one eye off the moon in Leo that he might meet the very oldest lady. She was ninety-four; had been chair-ridden for years.

"How come yo'-all to come, col'nel?" she quavered at him. "Yo' ain't seventy-five yet?"

"No," he replied, "I'm still pretty fairly young." He waved his white hand aloft, explaining: "I am here at the behest of Venus yonduh—to help ministuh to the wants of huh sweetest sistuhs!"

For, in age toward age, the antebellum chivalry is beautiful—and habitual.

"I hated fo' to come," she went on. "Lookin' so bad—"

"S'pose yo' do—I've nevuh seen yo'-all looking bettuh," and he bowed low.

Nancy nudged him.

"That's how I'll be, dad, before you ever let me have Tom—won't I? But I've just about decided to marry him in spite of you, tyrant!"

Then she tiptoed inside the church, to the cracked and ancient pipe-organ. The ob-

jector pumped it—he really was a valuable man—while the girl played and sang Stephen Foster through the window into tired yet eager ears, into the patiently ready souls out in that sandy yard. "Hard Times," she sang, and "Old Dog Tray," and—

And the old lady who lived in a chair said the singing brought her out of it, tottering and clutching tight upon the colonel's arm. "Reckon she'd go to huh tomb," she said, "a-thankin' little Nancy fo'—fo' bringin' back—" but nobody ever knew what. It happened just then. It was an odd manner of passing on—the other old ladies said that she died beautifully.

And the party broke up then, at eight forty-five. They were all sure of it, exactly, for the doctor had looked at his watch that he might record the death—another innovation in Callabee.

"Some day—" mused the colonel on his way toward home; a trifle agitated, he seemed to be—"some day ouh birth-rate heah might 'most catch up."

Two shots were heard that evening, very soon after the churchyard party.

Colonel Trahern Blalock was arrested the next morning, while superintending his log-loading for the market. Himself, he turned never a white hair; but his man let go the chain, and two fat logs rolled off the wagon.

"That may hint at my not selling them on this juhney," observed the colonel, surveying the fallen monarchs in the road.

"We'd have come an' got yo'-all last night," he was informed in a raucous tone from behind, "but the constable heah had went to bed an' wouldn't git up."

At sound of the hated voice Blalock had reached toward his hip-pocket—but Constable Fortin was awake now and quick enough.

"Bettuh not, suh," he advised. "Killin' is right bad, col'nel, but Palley heah says yo'-all has done a heap moah."

"Stealin' is what yo' stands accused of!" Homer Palley came around and directly in front of his enemy. "An' it's me what's got the document this time!"

He was careful to shake the warrant in

Blalock's face precisely as Blalock had shaken that foreclosure notice in his.

"See it? See this papuh? Reckon yo'-all might call it odd an' beautiful?"

The colonel went along peaceably, old Palley a victorious rear-guard. The patrician lips opened but once on the trip—to ask for an immediate hearing.

The prisoner was taken to the post-office, Callabee having no real jail—never had needed one till now—while the magistrate made ready the back room of his drug-store. Much homely justice had been meted out in this room in the past, with the aid of a high stool and the old pulpit from the church, a big deal-table, and a bunch of folding-chairs always kept here except when wanted for a home funeral. An almanac hung on the wall, so the judge would know when to plant his garden.

Public opinion was split between loyalty to the colonel and on how terrible a crime was theft. No crooks would ever dream of coming to Callabee, so it must have been one of their own clan. Homer Palley had been robbed of the contents of his long, red envelope; from two to six hundred dollars was mentioned definitely. Trahern Blalock was Palley's only avowed foe, therefore Blalock should at least state innocence.

A clincher of a point was that Tom Palley was to be chief witness for the prosecution, and the town-objector had told everybody over again this morning how young Palley had been thoroughly abused by the colonel in their recent quarrel. Not that Tom was a spiteful fellow, but— And all Callabee brought its opinions to the trial, limited only by the cubic space in that back room. Old Palley brought his despoiled red envelope.

The feudists entered at the same moment through opposite doors; Blalock's hands not being held now, he pulled his gun a fraction of a second before Palley got his out—then the constable took both weapons away and laid them on the big table centering the court.

Colonel Blalock seated himself calmly, yet his feelings were sadly outraged. Nancy could see this, and her hand found his as she sat beside him.

Homer Palley, a man of primeval narrow-

ness and its typical small features, stayed erect to tell his story.

"This heah envelope was emptied o' bills a' inch thick out o' my dwellin' last night," he began, showing his improvised wallet of heavy, dark-red manila. "Folks knows I nevuh b'lieved much in banks—ain't none heah in Callabee even if I did. An' I'd got most o' the intuhst money saved up—inch thick," he repeated, "an' bulgy, an' now it's flat!" He held up the emptied envelope to substantiate it. "All gone but the fo'closyuh papuh that's still left in t'othuh compahment in it—wonduh he didn't steal the papuh, too!"

Palley was glaring viciously at Blalock as he talked. He now started to shake his free fist at his foe, but changed wisely to hurling mere invective instead.

"That old sand-hill crane yonduh was seen goin' in an' comin' out o' my dwellin' last night! How come—when he ain't passed its doah befo' in fo'ty yeahs? An' when he'd gone my money was gone; so I've had him toted heah to the law. I'd reckoned on him a-bein' heah soon, anyhow, or ovuh at the county-seat, but I nevuh looked fo' this luck so quick—right bad luck, come to think."

"Who was it saw the colonel?" asked the magistrate.

The busy constable ushered Tom Palley in from the drug-store. Nancy looked the other way. She had learned of all that threatened this morning, so she couldn't be expected to look at Tom Palley.

The young soldier-moonshiner went to the witness-chair, went hesitatingly, yet with the poise of a duty that needs must be done. He demurred first at taking the oath, saying he wasn't intending to shoot at anybody like the last time they'd sworn him; and he added that lying hadn't ever run much in his family.

"I left the old folks' party just as they spoke of breakin' up," Tom Palley's testimony began. "My father, he stayed there to talk a while longer. I'd got near to home, about two-thirds past the Blalock high hedge, when I heard footsteps following—sorter sneaky an' uncertain, like a man that's had a bit too much. Don't know just what made me do it, but I dropped

myself down low beside the hedge and kept still till he'd gone by."

"Who was it?"

"I—I hate to tell. But I told father last night 'bout it, and he says I've got to tell the law."

"See the man plain?" questioned the judge.

"Didn't see him no way. I was crouchin' down, I told yo'."

"But yo'-all knew who it was?"

"Yes."

"How, if yo' didn't see him?"

"I saw his shadow, thrown over the hedge by the moonlight, straight across the concrete walk, an' moving as he passed along."

The magistrate studied; this was remarkable and rather odd.

"Isn't the moon too young yet to cast a shadow?" he finally inquired.

"Not on that white walk. It was faint, but I saw it plain."

"Of who?"

A dead pause, then came the words:

"I saw the long hair down his neck, an' the long cigar in his mouth—shadow of 'em, I mean—an' his hat."

Callabee was looking at its first citizen; all were looking hard, save Tom Palley. The boy breathed deeply, gave one dejected glance at the elder Palley, and went on:

"After he'd passed, I straightened up. I thought he might be out gunnin' for my father, and he can't see any too good in the day-time any more. He walked right to our house and went in; came out again in a minute or two. He turned west, then, toward the timber—then all of a sudden he pulled his gun an' shot."

"Did yo'-all fiah the othuh shot, Tom?"

"Me? Huh! I nevuh pack—carry—a gun in town; only when I'm in the back hills."

"Go ahead."

"I went on slow to our house. Father came in right after, spillin' out his empty shell. When he'd gone to his tin box and found the red envelope empty, except for that foreclosure paper, I happened to remember how the colonel said t'other day his left hand itching was a sign that he was going to get some money from us—the

interest money, he must have meant when he said it. Now he'd got it—come an' took it while he thought ev'rybody would stay round the party—took it so father couldn't try to stop the foreclosure by law."

Tom's own injured feelings had shown quite a little in that long speech, but he had carefully avoided looking toward Nancy. While the magistrate had again been occupied, thinking.

"Did yo'-all mean to say that when the col'nel passed fuhst he was outside his hedge?" he asked.

"Yes. I didn't see him go back home."

"And yo'-all was inside it when you saw his shadow, Tom—inside, and east o' the hedge?"

"Yes. Crouchin'."

"How come?"

"I reckon—presume—that he'd just happened to go outside that way instead of along his new walk."

"No! Why was yo'-all inside, I mean—" Tom hesitated and fidgeted. "The cou't demands that yo' say, suh!"

"I was inside there," answered Tom Palley, "hiding a couple o' gallons underneath the hedge. 'Tain't trimmed much, an' I've always hid 'em there."

The crowd exploded, aiming its delighted sallies at both the colonel and the moon-shiner, quite impartially. Tom Palley waited until every one was satisfied and quiet. Then he added, soberly:

"An' during the night I decided to empty 'em. I did it, too, just at sunup. I've quit—had a lesson. Yo' see, judge, I figure the colonel must 'a' felt sorter off last night, or he'd never have stole. He didn't need that money."

Since entering the court-room Colonel Blalock had not spoken; he had merely chewed a trifle harder on his black cigar, occasionally throwing a menacing eye on his enemy. But the magistrate—and his townfolks, turned anxious now—were silently awaiting his answer to Tom Palley's charges. Trahern Blalock rose in tall dignity; not to deny nor to defend, only to ask young Palley, mildly:

"Yo'-all left the pahty, yo' say, just ahead of its breaking up?"

"Yes, sir."

"A little befo' quahtuh to nine?"

"Must have been near that."

Blalock looked around him; the congregation eagerly corroborated.

"We found the money gone just as the town clock was a-strikin' nine," cut in old Palley with decision.

The colonel stepped over to the wall and lifted down the almanac, turning to the July, '19, page.

"Last night the moon set about eight thuhty, Washin'ton time. To us heah, we being only fifteen minutes or so from the point cent'al time begins, she sets therefo' about eight fo'ty-five; possibly a few seconds befo' or aftuh eight fo'ty-five. But"—and he smiled whimsically—"a full half-houh soonuh she ducks down behind my trees to the west, and we see huh no mo'. The moon couldn't have cast a shadow heah in Callabee aftuh eight fifteen last night!"

There was none to question the figures; almanacs were next to sacred truth in Callabee. And this particular almanac still adhered to the old-fashioned time, same as they did, and so came quite near to agreeing with celestial phenomena.

The moon had been behind the timber, and Tom Palley had lied. Consequently, how was his story of the colonel entering the Palley dwelling to be believed?

As Colonel Blalock sat down again, Nancy Blalock got up—to make one step toward the man in the witness-chair, a man whose face was livid with shame; perhaps some anger, too, was there.

"Thought you couldn't bear to fight your own Caroliny folks," the girl began intently, "and a man who doesn't lie; you said you were! Oh, what a cheap revenge! Why, dad begged my pardon the other night for what he'd said to you, before he could sleep. And I was ready to marry you, Tom Palley, in spite of him," she hurried on, ignoring the open eyes and mouths around her. "I might have stood a moonshiner, but I won't stand a liar. I'm done with you!"

Tom seemed to be trying to speak—but as Nancy sat down, the colonel got up; the House of Blalock appeared to have assumed the brunt of the proceedings. And the working countenance of the fine old

Southerner told of a hard struggle in the man of him.

"No, Nancy, deah, no! Mustn't abuse Tom. It—it's all my fault making yo' young folks wait so long; but I—I just couldn't beah to think of losing yo', deah—that's all I've held off my consenting fo'. And Tom is no liah—he did see my shadow, I reckon."

New buzzings now; the constable rapped for order.

"Yes, I went to the ho'se next doah, so'th, last night," Blalock continued. "Folks heah remembuh the Fo'th? Then yo' recall that old Palley shot fuhst last? I thank yo'. So I went, judge, but not in liquoh—I nevuh was that, suh. Why, the estimable lady I talked with last at the pahty could tell yo' I was puhfectly—but unfohtunately she is dead. I—I might have been a little nuhvous; prob'ly was, or I wouldn't have walked outside—must have done it quite unconsciously, suh. So young Thomas Palley could have seen my shadow, hat and haih and cigah; must have seen my nose, too—couldn't miss that."

"But, dad! The moon?" Nancy had picked up the almanac.

"Oh, she was down, back of the trees. Venus was up yet, howevuh, fo'ty minutes or so behind the moon—Venus was ovuh the timbuh till nine."

But, oh, how come? Nobody could believe that Venus cast shadows! Really the colonel was worse than Tom Palley.

"If I could git to my gun on that table, I'd show him a Venus shaduh!" snapped old Homer.

"Yo'-all can prove it to Palley, can't yo', col'nel"—a close friend suggested—"t'-night?"

"No, suh," Blalock answered. "T'-night the moon will be alongside of Venus—or even a bit latuh. I know, suh, fo' she is in the Lion, too."

Incredulous heads were wagging; the colonel looked annoyed.

"But I might prove it in ten days or so," he offered, "when the moon gets out of the sky again—Venus should still be bright enough then."

"Anything a man can prove ten days from now ought to prove t'-night just the

same," said the close friend, veering to the doubtfuls.

The colonel sat once more—although he'd discovered his chair not at all like the comfortable one on his porch—sat reflecting that it was a queer universe indeed where a man was unable to prove his own sacrifice. He bent and kissed his daughter absently.

Meanwhile old Homer Palley had been reconsidering, helped in it by a fitful recollection—and he now remarked, almost generously:

"Seems like I did see in a book once, somethin' 'bout Venus a throwin' a shaduh when she was the biggest—"

"Pooh!" said the objector. "They got books as says she's ten thousand miles away, too!"

"But that ain't nothin' to do with my money bein' took!" finished Palley, sharply regretful of his momentary softness.

Very true; in the furious astronomical discussion Venus had quite o'ershadowed the theft. So the constable rapped a semblance of order into the people as the druggist-magistrate rose—portentously, although he was no higher standing than when perched on his stool.

"Col'nel Blalock, suh," he said, "I reckon I got to ask yo'-all to face the cou't."

But the old gentleman had forestalled the command, being already on his feet again, and thinking disgustedly that this resembled his childhood spelling-class—up and down.

"Col'nel Blalock, suh; it huhts me to recall yo'-all's admission, suh, that yo' went to the Palleys without invitation—and quietlike, too, and in the dark. Now, suh, the State of No'th Caroliny is waiting to heah what yo'-all may have to say about the missing money—or anything else yo'-all might ca'h to talk about."

The colonel sighed before he spoke, slowly:

"If I couldn't make yo' folks believe Tom heah, or me about the evening stah, reckon it 'll be hahd to convince yo'. But I'll try to prove the money bettuh than I did the shadow"—with a dry little smile—"though I'd hoped I wouldn't have to be the one to tell yo' this."

He turned to address the other half of his feud.

"Palley, my consent to the young couple's marrying is now declah'd in cou't; but I ventuah yo'-all still stick to yo' old objections—"

"How come yo'-all think I'd change my mind?" countered Palley. "No marriage can go on with a fo'closyuh goin' on."

"So I had submised," said Blalock. He reached one hand sidewise toward the table, his eyes constantly on the enemy. "Just hand me my gun, Tom, please. I see I have to convuhse plainuh with yo' fathuh."

The son obeyed; but he took up and held the second gun himself—and Callabee held its breath.

"Pass ovuh to me that red envelope yo'-all's holding, Palley," ordered the colonel. "It seems to be the only item against me, 'cepting an unprovuhble shadow."

"I'll eat it fuhst!"

"Don't yo'!" The revolver threatened. "Couldn't miss yo'-all again this close, suh. Folks 'd talk. Look in the envelope, then."

"Nothin' in there but the fo'closin' notice, yo' old—"

"Then take it out."

Under the gun Homer Palley had to mind. So he grudgingly drew out—the *actual mortgage*, with "Paid" written diagonally across its bottom and over a signature, both in the colonel's stiff handwriting.

"And, yo'—yo'-all toted the intuhst money away, anyhow?" asked the bewildered judge.

"Suhtainly, suh," said the prisoner. "No So'thuhn would think of giving money to anothuh So'thuhn, suh—I'd hated to have had Palley offuh a present of money to me. But I could sell him the mo'hgage, whethuh he knew he was buying it or not. Besides, my left palm has nevuh been puhmitted to fool me, suh."

"Dad!" his daughter cried. "You tried to do something odd and beautiful yourself, didn't you?"

"It's fine!" cried Tom.

"It's a peacemakuh," said old Palley, meaning the document.

"It was really very odd, daddy dear," said Nancy. "Very odd, and—"

"And pretty faih," said Colonel Trahern Blalock complacently. "Reckon I'm not too wo'n out to invent one idea."



# A Moor There Was

by Eugene A. Clancy

THE native inhabitants of Tangier, Morocco, seem to have an ingrowing aversion to the light of day. They simply hate to have windows to their houses. The room in which Steve Marsh and I lodged with our amiable Moorish host, Mr. Gibilo, was entered through a hole in the wall, a very small and forbidding hole.

It took me some weeks to become accustomed to this delightful abode and feel easy in it, to say nothing of breathing in it. But in time the only annoyance I experienced was an inability to tell whether it was day or night, whether Mr. Gibilo was preparing breakfast or supper. As both meals were the same, consisting of Moorish tea and cigarettes, I always had to inquire just which we were about to have.

One morning—I had duly inquired and found that it was morning—I awoke to find Steve sitting up on his Oriental rug and watching the Moor's operations with no great favor. "Gibilo," he finally burst out, "your Moorish menu may be all right from an artistic viewpoint, but in my country you would be instantly hung, drawn, and bisected!"

Mr. Gibilo, as usual, merely grinned from ear to ear, and went on with his nefarious preparations. He dumped a plentiful supply of green tea into the pot, covered it with mint leaves, and packed down the concoction with great lumps of sugar. Then he grabbed the kettle from the charcoal fire and poured boiling water over the lumps of sugar. He let it draw for a minute; then our breakfast was ready.

While we were sipping our tea, we heard

some one groping up the narrow stone stairs. Then, outside the hole, a female voice indulged in some Arabic words.

Getting up, Mr. Gibilo crawled through the hole and there ensued a noise resembling a violent barrage—which merely implied that two Moors, a lady and a gentleman, were holding quiet converse in Arabic. At last the din of battle subsided. We heard the lady groping her way down the stairs, and Mr. Gibilo crawled back through the hole.

"Gibilo," said Steve, "I do not wish to intrude, but may I ask who and why is your lady friend?"

"This lady," the Moor replied, "she is number-one wife of my dear friend Hamzah, what is same as own brother to me. She bring me very bad news indeed! She have come to say that Hamzah is very sick. Hamzah, he have very good job. He is—what you call it—he is private go-it-between for Moorish governor, who want him now to work. Hamzah, he cannot, and him afraid him lose him job. He want me to come talk what he do. It is very bad, this, and I am very sorry for my friend Hamzah."

Here Mr. Gibilo lit a pipe of keef and began to wait to himself lugubriously.

"Gibilo," Steve asked, after a silence, "do you mind telling me just what line of graft your friend Hamzah follows? What go-it-between business is the governor keen on at present?"

"Hamzah," replied the Moor, "he is very faithful man. He do lots of jobs for governor. He have kill lots of mens

what governor do not like, and he do it very nice indeed—nobody know, and governor not bothered at all. Hamzah can sing mighty fine verses, too—oh, him very clever man!

"But job governor want done now is not kill—it much more difficul' job, very importance! You see, governor he very big man and he need lots of money. Him need much money right now. He have hear that there is much money in town of Azila just now, and he have suddenly remember that Sheikh of Azila have not pay him taxes for long time; so he send to Hamzah and tell him to go at once and collect taxes of Azila.

"Governor is in mighty big hurry, and if Hamzah not go right away, he lose job sure, for governor he damquick kind of man what listen to nothing. I be afraid my friend is in very bad state indeed!"

Gibilo got up sadly and removed the teapot, the empty cups, and the little flat board on which all meals were served in the middle of the floor.

Steve lit a cigarette and looked at me thoughtfully. "Bill," he mused, "the sad tale we have just heard has affected me greatly. I positively feel for this poor man Hamzah—I have a real yearning to help him—especially as he is such a dear friend of Gibilo's. I think we might do something. I know very little about taxes, having neither collected them or paid them. But just as a mere matter of curiosity I should like just now to see a town that has a lot of money in it.

"I have heard of Azila; it is a village about a day and night's ride from Tangier—and the idea of Azila having a lot of money in it is preposterous! It is simply not to be tolerated. His nobs the governor is quite right—Azila should be made to give up instantly! In fact, now that I think of it, I am quite angry at Azila—keeping back its lawful taxes and getting a clever man like Hamzah into trouble!"

He turned to the Moor. "Gibilo, stop hitting that pipe for a moment and listen to me! Doesn't that shaven head of yours ever think of anything? Why don't you yourself go to Azila in place of Hamzah and do this little job for him? You can take his papers—or whatever he uses, his

knives and poisons, perhaps—and the governor need know nothing about it."

"Oh, my dear friend Americano!" Mr. Gibilo cried, embracing Steve according to the Moorish custom. "I have never think of that! It is idea, and I do it! I go right away to Hamzah, and I start for Azila to-night!"

"That's the stuff!" Steve approved. "And, my dear Gibilo, what do you think—we are going, too!"

Mr. Gibilo looked suddenly dubious. "But, my dear friends," he said, "I do not think it is that you can come. It is not safe for American mens in Azila—Sheikh of Azila is very bad man indeed—"

"Gibilo," Steve interrupted, "tell all that stuff to yourself and the tourists. We gave you the main idea, and we are in on the deal. Oh, yes, we go to Azila with you, Mr. Gibilo."

As Gibilo was about to reply, a small Moorish boy came tumbling through the hole in the wall and filled our room with shrill Arabic noises. We stood him on his head in an effort to calm him; we gently thumped him and twisted him about; then, in despair, Steve laid him flat on his back on a rug and sat upon him. This had the desired effect, and the youth became quiet enough for Gibilo to ask questions. The answers called for much more noise.

"The very small boy say," Gibilo explained, "that he have been sent to Mr. Steve by custom-house. The Gibraltar boat have come in and it have brought something for him, and custom-house people want him to come at once for they have no idea."

Steve stood up, thus enabling the squirming messenger to do likewise. "All right, Gibilo," he said; "you go and fix that Azila business with Hamzah, while we go and relieve the tension at the custom-house. Meet us in the Spanish café."

Preceded by the small boy, Steve and I at once set out for that most remarkable of institutions, the Moorish Custom-house, which does business in a shed at the shore end of the pier. Its methods are strange and wonderful, and in itself it consists mostly of one long counter, behind which recline five fat and aged Moors who pass the time

alternately sleeping and screaming whenever they have any work to do.

Reaching this den of graft, we found half the Moors in town gathered there, making a very bedlam of noise. Resting on the counter, with a tag on it addressed to Steve, was a motor-cycle.

At once we understood the excitement. As there are no streets, only crooked alleyways, in Tangier, no such thing as a motor-cycle or an automobile is ever seen there. The mule, the donkey, and the horse are supreme. Obviously, the motor-cycle was a new one on the native populace. In Spanish, the head fat boy asked what this shipment was.

"My friend," Steve replied, "I am surprised at your ignorance. This is a new war engine which I am thinking of presenting to the local government—if I can find it. Let me show you how the thing works!"

Steve had found that there was plenty of gas in the tank, so, slipping the stand under the rear wheel, he jumped to the seat and let her go. The Moors also went, flying for their lives. Then we got the machine down and wheeled it outside.

The head fat boy, in a sort of graft agony, screwed up his courage and approached. "It is indeed a wonderful gun engine," he said, "and Allah will love thee—the duty is fifty dollars."

Steve looked at me. "Bill," he said, "I was just going to be nice and give the old boy a ride, but now I'll beat it up to the Kasbah and tell the governor to put him in the can—look out!"

And Steve and the motor-cycle shot away from there. I don't know how he did it on those unpaved and sandy alleyways, but I watched him wind and shoot up the Kasbah hill, Moors, mules and donkeys scattering to right and left. The fat boy was left cursing Steve and screaming many things to Allah.

I wandered into the Spanish café to await the results of the morning's various excitements. In about half an hour I heard a riot drawing near, and Steve and the motor-cycle shot up to the café, the entire native population of Tangier panting in the rear.

"I've fixed the duty business with his

nobs, the governor," said Steve. "He wants the machine himself! In fact, he wants it so bad that I left him sobbing like a child because he can't buy it right away—he is broke. He offered me a sacred camel and a Koranic charm against fleas for it, but I explained to him that as much as I valued camels, especially sacred ones, and longed for a charm against fleas, nothing but cash would give me any real pleasure. Then he implored me to wait only three days, and he would give me three hundred dollars for it!"

"Look here," I asked, "will you explain how this motor-cycle has dropped from the heavens? How did you come by it—and couldn't you think of anything more useless here? You could have sent for a pair of ice skates—"

"Don't try to be funny," said Steve. "I simply forgot to tell you. I got it for a song from an English army man over in Gib last week. He needed the money. But now—about his nobs. Don't you see the unexpected possibilities of this motor-cycle which you sneer at? In three days the governor will give me three hundred bones for it. Don't you see, Bill—when Gibilo, alias Hamzah—returns with the taxes of Azila, his nobs the governor will have a bunch of change to spend on a few little things for himself, one of which will be a motor-cycle!"

"Well," I admitted, "it does look pretty good—it's almost too easy. We had better stow the machine away in a safe place while we are away at Azila—though what we can accomplish in Azila is beyond me."

"Bill," said Steve, leaning back wearily, "I really think your upper works are as much congealed as Gibilo's! We are going to Azila more than ever before. And this motor-cycle is going right along with us. It's a good thing that I appointed myself business manager of our travels, or I fully believe you would starve to death. Haven't you been here long enough to know that a Moor will sell his soul for a new toy? Don't you remember the holy man who mortgaged his harem for a phonograph?"

"I have a hunch that the most profitable market for motor-cycles just now is the village of Azila. I am feeling quite an in-

terest in this particular business—I had no idea that it contained such possibilities for salesmanship. Speaking as an emergency salesman, then, I regard the governor of Tangier as a weak and unreliable prospect. I shall sell this machine at the source of profit, Azila. Later, I may apply for the Tangier agency. You, now, might work the Sahara Desert—”

I was saved from further insults to my intelligence by the arrival of Mr. Gibilo, who, having been a guide to European tourists for several years and thus being a bit sophisticated, faced the motor-cycle manfully, without a quiver. He examined it with great interest.

“This,” he said, “is engines bicycle of which I have heard, yes? It have go like Gibraltar governor’s autumbobble!”

And Mr. Gibilo was getting on deck and evidently going to give himself a ride without further delay, to the great awe and admiration of his fellow townsmen.

Steve persuaded him to desist, and brought the Moorish mind back to the sickness of Hamzah and the taxes of Azila. All was arranged, Mr. Gibilo said, and we were to start that evening. He must have been a born sport and joy-rider by nature, for nothing could exceed his delight when he heard that the motor-cycle was to accompany us. He sat on his rug all afternoon, playing his gimbri and reciting speed-limit verses.

In the evening we went to the Grand Soko, or big market, and mounted our intelligent mules. Two donkey boys were engaged to respectively push and pull the motor-cycle. Six Moorish soldiers, on military donkeys, rode with us.

“Steve,” I asked, as we picked our way through the hills back of Tangier, “would you mind telling me now, precisely and concisely, what you intend to do with this machine in Azila? Just tell me that, and I shall repress what I think of this whole expedition.”

“My dear Bill,” Steve answered, “where ignorance is native, as in you, for instance, it is bad taste to be peevish. My sales campaign is not yet fully rounded out—I may insert a coupon in all the leading papers of Azila. I don’t know.”

I made no reply. When Steve begins to enjoy himself in that way, there is nothing to do but shut up.

Azila proved to be quite a nifty little town and thoroughly up to date in the Moorish sense. That is, it was completely lacking in any faint suggestion of civilization. It was native Tangier over again on a small scale, with its gutters, two-foot-wide alleyways, padlocked stone houses, and packing-box bazaars.

The town also boasted a tiny Kasbah, or government house, on the steps of which, as we rode up, the Sheikh was now standing, completely surrounded by a magnificent retinue of two exceedingly dirty slaves. The Sheikh was a middle-aged, black-bearded, villainous-looking cuss, with knives-and-poison calculation in his gentle Moorish eyes.

As he looked at me, he smiled so pleasantly that I felt a cold tickle down my spine, for I could feel his mind working a mile a minute figuring out how best he could entertain himself with us—whether by plain murder or slow torture in boiling oil.

He carefully sized up our six soldiers, read the Tangier governor’s letter—which contained, disguised as usual in sweet language, the most direful and bloody threats—and then seemed to decide that on the whole he was just longing to pay up his taxes. He welcomed Mr. Gibilo, alias Hamzah, like a king, and when we were introduced as two distinguished American travelers, he fell off the steps and embraced us—but I could still feel that gentle speculation and delicate calculation in his eye.

Then the eye lit on the motor-cycle, and the Sheikh asked more unanswerable questions in a minute than an American child could think up in a whole year.

Prompted by Steve, Mr. Gibilo explained that the remarkable object was a very valuable steel steed owned by the two Americans who, after the important business of collecting the taxes was settled, would take a sublime pleasure in demonstrating its nature to their new and dearly cherished friend, the Sheikh of Azila.

The tax collecting began at once. Now, we naturally had an idea that the Sheikh

would simply go to the strong-room and draw out the cash, or give Mr. Gibilo an official order on Azila's Tangier bankers. Nothing so crudely businesslike and inartistic occurred. We found, to our amazement, that the taxes were to be literally collected, physically extracted from the wailing and protesting population!

The Sheikh, with a large leather bag over his shoulder, put himself at the head of our soldiers and went chasing all over his panic-stricken town, collaring every man, woman and child and shaking them down for whatever they were unfortunate enough to have on them in the way of cash.

Children about to buy candy were mulcted of their pennies; old ladies on the way to market were forced to give up, and the cash box of every bazaar was confiscated. Those who really had nothing on them were immediately sent to the Kasbah jail and chained to the wall therein until such time as they could stir up a good, fat bail.

Never was a population so harried and nerve-wracked. They couldn't tell just where the Sheikh was going to turn up next. He was here, he was there, flying up this alley and down that, lurking around corners when he was thought to be far away, and pouncing out on unsuspecting passers-by.

This went on all day, until, at five in the evening, the leather bag had attained a satisfying and fascinating bulge, and the Sheikh announced that the taxes were duly collected and that we would now return to the Kasbah.

Steve had been making a human cash register of himself all day, and his eyes were bloodshot with the effort. "Bill," he said, "this revenue hunting is an ideal sport—it beats big game stalking and dominoes, any way you look at it! That bag contains, in Moorish coins, Spanish and French notes, to say nothing of three plugged francs and a brass button, the splendid sum of seven hundred and sixteen dollars and fifty cents. This territory is simply made for a motor-cycle salesman!"

Having deposited the leather bag in some mysterious place in the Kasbah, the Sheikh eagerly turned his mind to the motor-cycle. Steve set it going on its stand—and the

Sheikh fled screaming into the Kasbah, yelling for the soldiers to shoot everything and everybody.

The holocaust was prevented by Mr. Gibilo instantly and loudly explaining what the engine's bicycle was. The Sheikh came slowly out and then stood entranced as he saw Steve shoot down the alley and disappear around the corner. His eyes fairly popped as he heard that machine pounding all around Azila, and when Steve came shooting back, the Sheikh did a Moorish joy trot.

Steve got off, and the Sheikh hurled himself blindly into the seat and nearly put the thing out of business in his wild zeal for instant action. At last, after much screaming, we got him to understand that he must sit behind Steve and hold on tight. He did so, and the trembling citizens of Azila beheld their Sheikh flying through town at sixty miles an hour, his burnous and turban standing out behind in a straight line. He demanded practical lessons on riding himself, and for an hour we struggled up and down the main alley with him, until darkness came to our relief.

"The Sheikh," Mr. Gibilo announced over our coffee in the Kasbah, "he say he cannot live any more without engine's bicycle. He say that if you will give it to him, he will give you in exchange his very best nice daughter in marriage."

"Tell the gracious Shiekh," said Steve, looking at me with inscrutable eyes, "that his offer overwhelms me with joy and gratitude, but rule thirty-nine of my country's marriage laws positively forbids us to take wives in exchange for engine's bicycles. Tell him also that I regret to say that this machine promised to the Governor of Tangier. Explain to the Sheikh, Gibilo, using your best manner, that the Governor of Tangier insists on paying me three hundred dollars for this particular engine."

The effect of this on the Sheikh was to sink him into a deep and thoughtful silence. You see, if there was one thing in the world that the Sheikh of Azila wanted to do with his whole soul, it was to put a good, hard one over on the Governor of Tangier. After five minutes of thought, he got up and went into an inner room. We

smoked cigarettes in silence until he returned.

"The Sheikh say," Mr. Gibilo interpreted, "that much as he love his dear friend the Governor of Tangier, he cannot live without engines bicycle. He beg and implore you to leave this one here and he give you for it four hundred dollars. He say you can explain to governor and get him 'nother engines."

"Tell the Sheikh," said Steve, as he rolled another cigarette, "that I am in a really painful position. The Governor of Tangier is my personal and cherished friend and I shall have great difficulty explaining to him. However, I have received such hospitality in Azila, and the Sheikh has inspired me with such feelings of friendship that I cannot refuse him. In fact, I would give him the thing as a gift, were it not so very valuable,—having cost me much money in its acquisition. Tell him he may have it for four hundred dollars, Gibilo, and perhaps I can get another for the governor."

This was no sooner translated than the Sheikh removed his hands from the folds of his burnoose and counted out on the floor the sum of four hundred dollars in Spanish and French bank-notes. The moment Steve had pocketed the money, the Sheikh ordered the motor-cycle brought into the room, that he might not lose a single minute in feeling the joys of possession.

More coffee and other drinkables appeared; pipes of keef were lit; singers and gimbrì players were summoned, and the Sheikh started to make a night of it. Upwards of a thousand verses were recited before I finally fell asleep.

More riding lessons had to be given in the morning, and by the time we were ready to start back to Tangier, the enraptured Moor was actually able to go it alone, though a little on the bias. When we all stood in front of the Kasbah, about to ride, the Sheikh solemnly handed Mr. Gibilo the leather bag containing the taxes of Azila, and I could not help remarking how much that bag had shrunk.

The Sheikh, however, seemed to notice nothing of the sort. He made a lengthy speech in Arabic, and gave Mr. Gibilo a

letter to the Governor of Tangier. Mr. Gibilo looked strangely moody and upset, but Steve gave him no time for words—He embraced the Sheikh with much affection, and I was forced to follow suit. With many Arabic blessings, we set forth.

"Steve," I asked, when we were well on our way, "have you noticed the—the weak condition of that bag?"

Steve grinned. "Isn't it queer," he replied, "how these pesky revenue things will shrink? I have an idea Gibilo can explain this particular case. Gibilo, what did the agreeable Sheikh say to you—what might be his gladsome message to his nobs?"

"He have tole the governor," said Mr. Gibilo, "somethings like this in letter: Times are very bad indeed. He is very sorry, but after most terrible hard work of day and night, he have been able to collect only three hundred and sixteen dollars taxes, what are to be found in bag. He say, however, he expect to send five hundred dollar more very soon.

"He explain that he have very good luck to buy from—he say just this, Mr. Steve—from crazy American man a wonderful engines bicycle, which he is going to take right away to Maraksh and offer to Sultan, whose favorite wife is Sheikh's number two nice daughter. He say he sure Sultan pay him thousand dollar for so wonderful engines bicycle, and then he, the Sheikh, will gladly make divide the thousand dollar with his dear friend, the Governor of Tangier—"

Steve rose in his saddle and fairly screeched, just like a native. "Bill," he roared, "this country will be the death of me yet! Stung—and by an old devil of a Sheikh! Why, he pinched four hundred out of the taxes to pay for the bike—and now he is going to sell it to the Sultan for a thousand—and he will, too! Some Sheikh!"

"The Sheikh," I couldn't help remarking, "is my idea of a nifty salesman—*your* best territory is the Atlantic Ocean—as a motor-cycle salesman."

Steve merely swore and glared over his shoulder—in the direction of Azila.

It was a sad journey back. Thinking of how artistically we had been stung, even

the four hundred didn't make us feel much better.

The following evening, as Mr. Gibilo was preparing his everlasting tea, we heard some one groping up the stairs. A body came through the hole in the wall and prostrated itself on the floor. When it raised its face, I recognized no less a person than one of the Sheikh of Azila's very dirty slaves! After much beating of the brow on the stone floor, the lowly one burst forth into Arabic.

"The slave say," Mr. Gibilo interpreted, "that his most sublime master have sent him to beg that you come to Azila at once, or send him magic word. The wonderful engines bicycle have died! He and all Azila

have prayed all day and night in mosque, and holy mens have kept hands on engines bicycle for three times three hours, but it make no move. The Sheikh have even sacrificed three sacred camels and a white cat, but still it do not move. Therefore, he pray you with much weepings and implorings to come, or send magic word!"

"Tell this menial," said Steve, glaring and rolling a cigarette, "to instruct his most sublime master to go to—to the nearest garage, and get a gallon of the best gasoline. Or, if he cannot find a garage, just to fill himself with a gallon of Azila whisky, sit on the engines bicycle backward, and breathe regularly against the rear wheel!"

## PADDLE-SONG

HAROLD REXFORD

**H**APPINESS is brimming o'er down along the river—  
Not a care in all the world, and not a thing to do!  
Every silvery songster's throat with melody's aquiver;  
Little tufts of snowy fleece are floating in the blue.

Rosy glory o'er the hills, flooding all the valley—  
June time and tune time—and is there any wo?  
Softly, sweetly, from the south, baby breezes dally;  
Smoothly glides the light canoe down the river's flow.

Voices of the woods and shore the wander-song are singing—  
Oh, glad song! Oh, mad song! Who would stay at home?  
Grip the paddle, bend the blade, the water backward flinging—  
Swirling eddies, rainbow-tinted, churned to milky foam.

Through the golden afternoon the boat is slowly drifting,  
Dreamily and drowsily, while fragrant pipes glow red.  
Soft and low the ripples flow, and pearly light is sitting  
Through the murmurous arches of the branches overhead.

Purpling vapors wrap the shore all along the river—  
Beach the boat, pitch the camp, for we have journeyed far.  
Circling round the fire's glow, dancing shadows quiver;  
Tremulous, above the pines, burns a single star.

# Speeding up Production in the Nation's Industries

**F**ROM every corner of America comes the cry for increased production. Can it be answered?

Yes!

No magic can increase the supply of labor or the amount of time—but there are ways to increase the *productivity* of labor and the *value* of time.

For instance. In factories, mills and warehouses the country over, production is being retarded by old methods of weighing or speeded up by the modern method.

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Tons may now be weighed with the same speed as pounds. Instantly indicating correct weight on their easily-read clock-faced dials, Toledo Scales make accuracy of heavy weighing *automatic* and *uniform*, instead of its being dependent upon the patience and skill of the individual operator.

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But just as Toledo Springless Automatic Counter Scales have revolutionized weighing in retail stores everywhere—so also, Toledo Springless Automatic Heavy Capacity Scales are revolutionizing weighing in the factories, mills and warehouses of the Nation's Big Industries.

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**Toledo Scale Company, Toledo, O.**

*Largest Automatic Scale Manufacturers  
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# TOLEDO SCALES

## NO SPRINGS ~ HONEST WEIGHT

# *"I Said Hires"*

**I**T is important that *you* say "Hires". Because Hires is pure and healthful; while imitations of Hires may be harmful.



*Nothing goes into Hires but the pure, healthful juices of roots, barks, herbs, berries—and pure cane sugar. The quality of Hires is maintained in spite of tremendously increased costs of ingredients. Yet you pay no more for Hires the genuine than you do for an artificial imitation.*

Don't trifle with imitations. Say "Hires" at the fountain, or order it in bottles, by the case, from the dealer.

THE CHARLES E. HIRES COMPANY, PHILADELPHIA

# Hires

*Hires contains juices of 16 roots, barks, herbs and berries*